

Stefan Zweig  
ERASMUS  
— AND —  
THE RIGHT TO  
HERESY







ERASMUS





ERASMUS



THE RIGHT TO  
HERESY

STEFAN ZWEIG

*Translated by Eden and Cedar Paul*



A CONDOR BOOK  
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ERASMUS

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THE RIGHT TO HERESY



I tried to find out whether Erasmus of Rotterdam was an adherent of that party, but a certain merchant said to me: "Erasmus est homo per se" (Erasmus stands alone).

—*Epistolae obscurorum virorum*, 1515.

## Chapter 1

### THE MAN'S AIMS AND SIGNIFICANCE

ERASMUS of Rotterdam, the greatest and most brilliant star of his century, is to-day, we cannot deny the fact, hardly more than a name. His numerous works, written in an obsolete, supranational tongue (the Latin of the humanists), sleep undisturbed upon the shelves of libraries; hardly a single one of them, though in their day they enjoyed world-wide fame, has any message to our epoch. His personality has been put into the shade by mightier and more imposing reformers, partly because Erasmus's character was difficult to understand, and also because it was full of ambiguities and contradictions. There is little of an entertaining nature to tell of his private affairs; for a man who leads a retired and extremely busy intellectual life scarcely lends himself to description, and is, therefore, a meagre subject for the biographer. But even his actual achievement lies buried and hidden from the eyes of our generation—just as a foundation-stone is concealed beneath the completed edifice. From the outset, that we may get a clear and comprehensive view of the great and forgotten man, I must insist upon the facts that Erasmus of Rotterdam was, of all the writers and creators in the West, the first conscious European, the first to fight on behalf of peace, the ablest champion of the humanities and of a spiritual ideal. The tragedy of his life, and one which binds him to us in closer brotherly affection, was that he sustained defeat in the struggle for a juster and more harmonious shaping of our mental world.

Erasmus loved many things which we ourselves are fond of; he loved poetry and philosophy, books and works of art, languages and peoples; he loved the whole of mankind without distinction of race or colour, loved it for the sake of a higher civilization. One thing alone did he whole-heartedly detest, and that was fanaticism, which he looked upon as contrary to reason. He himself was the least fanatical of mortals; it is open to question whether he was a man of first-class intelligence, but no one will deny that he was a man of wide knowledge; his kindliness of heart may not have been overwhelming, but he unquestionably had a straightforward disposition to be kindly; and these qualities combined to make every form of intellectual intolerance irksome to him and led him to consider it as the greatest evil encumbering our earth. He was convinced that nearly all the conflicts arising between men and peoples could be adjusted happily through a little yielding on both sides, since every conflict lies in the domain of the human; and there were hardly any differences of opinion that might not be liquidated satisfactorily were not the area of dispute needlessly expanded. On this ground Erasmus set his face against every form of fanaticism, whether religious, national, or philosophical, considering it as the prime enemy to mutual understanding. He detested bigotry in all its manifestations; he loathed the stiff-necked and the biased, whether these wore a priestly cassock or a professorial gown; he hated those who put on blinkers, and the zealots of every class and race who demanded immediate acquiescence in their own opinions while looking upon the ideas that failed to correspond with theirs as rank heresy or rascality. Just as he himself never wished to impose his outlooks upon his neighbour, so in turn did he refuse to be burdened with the religious or political theories of others if these happened to be alien and unacceptable. He took it as a matter of course that a



man had a right to his own opinions; absolute independence of mind was essential. Himself a free spirit, he looked upon it as a fettering of the delightful manifoldness of the universe when, from pulpit or university chair, a man declared his truth to be the only truth, to be a special message which God had whispered into his ear and his ear alone. His life long and with the full powers of his brilliant and incisive intelligence, he fought incessantly against the crazy dogmatism of fanatics, and seldom was he able to smile indulgently over his enemies' vagaries. In these rare and auspicious moments, narrow-minded fanaticism appeared merely as a regrettable sign of intellectual limitation, as one of the many forms of "stultitia" whose thousands of varieties and shapes he made such delicious fun of in his *In Praise of Folly*, where he achieves a most amusing classification. He himself was absolutely fair-minded and incapable of prejudice, so that he could be genuinely sorry even for his bitterest enemy whose foibles he understood. At bottom, however, Erasmus always felt that this ill-omened characteristic of human nature, this fanaticism, would disturb his own spiritual world and the gentle tenor of his life.

For Erasmus's mission, the meaning of his existence was to bring into a harmonious synthesis all the contradictions which the human brain is capable of entertaining. He was of a conciliatory disposition; or, as Goethe (who had, in common with Erasmus, a strong dislike of extremes) phrased it, his was a "communicative nature." Every mighty upheaval, every *tumultus*, every clamorous and multitudinous wrangle, was antagonistic to his sense of clarity and reasonableness in the domain of thought. He felt it to be his vocation to fight for universal lucidity. In especial, he looked upon war as the grossest and most powerful manifestation of inner contradictions, and as irreconcilable with his conception of what constituted a moral and reflective man. His greatest asset was that he



was endowed with a forbearing disposition which enabled him to exercise the rare art of minimizing conflicts by indulgent understanding, of clearing up ambiguities, of smoothing out confusions, of reuniting what had been rent, of giving back a mutual cohesion to those who were divided. This many-sided desire for conciliation was gratefully recognized by Erasmus's contemporaries, when they coined the neologism "Erasmism" in order to describe it, and it was to "Erasmism" that this one man in all the world wished to lead mankind. Since he united within himself every form of creative activity, being poet, man of letters, theologian, and pedagogue, he considered that even the most disparate entities were capable of fusion; no sphere did he deem unattainable or alien to his arts of persuasion. So far as Erasmus was concerned, there existed neither a moral nor an unbridgeable antagonism between Jesus and Socrates, between Christian teaching and the wisdom of classical antiquity, between piety and ethics. He, an ordained priest, accepted the heathen into his intellectual paradise; and in the same spirit of tolerance he took his place side by side with the Fathers of the Church. Philosophy, so far as he was concerned, was just as pure a method of the search for God as was theology, and he did not gaze more reverently into the Christian heaven than into the Olympus of the Greeks. Nor did he, as did Calvin and the other zealots, look upon the Renaissance with its sensual and cheerful exuberance as the enemy of the Reformation, but as the latter's enfranchised sister. Settled in no country and at home in all, the first conscious European and cosmopolitan, Erasmus recognized no superiority of one nation over another; and, since he had disciplined his mind to estimate each people by the criterion of the noblest and most cultured of its sons, by its élite, each seemed to him as worthy of affection as the others. To unite the men of good will in every land, from every race and class, in one

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great league of the enlightened—this sublime endeavour constituted his personal aim in life; and, since he converted Latin, the supranational language of his day, into a more literary, more flexible tool for conveying thought and comprehension, he thereby created for the peoples of Europe a means of expression which, during a moment in the history of human development, bound them in an intellectual harmony transcending frontiers. This, indeed, was an unforgettable achievement. His wide vision led him to look gratefully back into the past; while his trustful turn of mind made him confidently anticipate the future. But where the barbarism of the world was concerned, the barbarism which rudely oversets God's plans, which continuously endeavours to destroy the divine ordering of things, to this barbarism he resolutely turned a blind eye. He was attracted to the higher sphere, to that which imparts form and creative activity; and he esteemed it the duty of every intellectual to widen and extend this realm so that the radiance emanating from the heavenly abode might in the end pour down upon the whole of mankind. The fundamental belief of the earlier humanists—and it was their beautiful though tragical error—was that the progress of their fellow-mortals could be achieved by means of enlightenment; and Erasmus, together with others of his way of thinking, honestly believed that the individual and the community could attain to a higher level of culture through the spread of education in which writing, study, and books were to play the most decisive part. These early idealists had a touching and wellnigh religious trust in the capacity of human nature to become more noble by means of the unremitting cultivation of learning and of reading. Erasmus, being a believer in the tremendous importance of printed knowledge, never doubted for a second that good conduct was simply a matter of suitable instruction. The problem as to how human life may

attain to complete harmony seemed to him to be elucidated by the humanizing of mankind, which he fancied was quite near to achievement.

Such a dream was calculated to act as a powerful magnet attracting the best intellects of the epoch from every land. To men of an ethical bent, personal existence has invariably seemed insignificant and unreal when divorced from the comforting thought, the soul-freeing delusion, that the individual, too, can contribute by his wishes and his deeds towards the perfectionment of the world at large. Each epoch is but a step in the direction of this desired perfectionment; is but a preparation for the better conduct of life. He who, on the strength of such a hope, fully believes in the possibility of man's moral progress through the birth of new ideals, becomes the leader of his generation. Erasmus was precisely such a man. His concept of a united Europe under the ægis of humanism came at a peculiarly auspicious hour, for the great discoveries and inventions of the turn of his century, the revivifying of science and art by the Renaissance, had brought a fresh and happy current into the collective life of Europe.

After countless years of spiritual oppression, the western world recaptured its sense of confidence in its own mission, so that in every land the finest idealists flocked to the standard of humanism. Each desired to acquire citizenship in the new world of culture: emperors, popes, princes, priests, artists, statesmen, youths, and women, vied with one another in assimilating a knowledge of the arts and sciences; Latin became the universal language, an early Esperanto in the realm of intellectual cohesion. For the first time since the break-up of Roman civilization, an all-embracing European culture came into being mainly through the instrumentality of Erasmus and his republic of letters; for the first time national vanity was eclipsed and the well-being of



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mankind as a whole was set up as the goal. And this desire of the educated to bind themselves together in the realm of the spiritual, this wish to create a language which should be a supranational tongue, this longing that peace should be brought to every land by means of an understanding that superseded the individual nations, this triumph of reason over unreason, was Erasmus's own triumph, was his own short and ephemeral but sacred hour in the tale of mankind's years.

Why could not a realm so unsullied endure? How can we account for the fact that these lofty and humane ideals of spiritual understanding, that "Erasmism," exercised so slight an influence upon men who had long since learned to recognize the absurdity of internecine hostility? Thorny questions—but we needs must acknowledge that a sublime ideal has never, so far, fully penetrated to the broad masses of the people, even when such an ideal would obviously advantage the human commonwealth. The average man is under the spell of hatred, which demands its rights to the detriment of loving-kindness; and ingrained egotism drives mankind to seek personal advantage from every new ideal. For the masses, a thing of concrete and tangible utility invariably takes precedence of an abstract good, so that in politics people will rally round a slogan which, instead of awakening enthusiasm for friendly co-operation, arouses a spirit of rivalry, instils an easily comprehended and obvious antagonism against an alien class, an alien race, an alien religious creed. The devouring flames of fanaticism are far more easily kindled by hate than by any other means. The young long to look a concrete enemy in the face, one whose hackles are rising like their own. Hence a supranational and panhuman ideal such as Erasmism lacks that elementary attraction which a mettlesome encounter with the foe who lives across a frontier, speaks another tongue, and holds another creed, invariably

exercises. The spirit of faction will, therefore, unfailingly reap a victory by appealing to the inexhaustible discontent of mankind and turning it into certain definite channels. In humanism, in Erasmus's teaching, however, there is no room for the passion of hatred; on the contrary, the distant and scarcely visible goal towards which it heroically and patiently strives is formed of an aristocracy of the spirit; and until this goal is reached, the folk of which humanists dreamed, the all-embracing European nation, cannot be compacted into a united whole. Pan-Europa, Cosmopolis, must exist before it can win general allegiance. Idealists as well as those who know human nature, those who believe in the ultimate achievement of unity among men, cannot afford to blink the fact that their work in this cause is perpetually menaced by irrational passion; they need to realize in all humility that at any moment the flood-gates of fanaticism may burst open; and, pressed forward by the primal instincts lying at the base of all that is mortal, the torrent of unreason will break down the dams and inundate and destroy everything that impedes it. Nearly every generation experiences such a set-back, and it is the duty of each to keep a cool head until the disaster is over and calm is restored.

It was Erasmus's tragical destiny to live through such a time of storm and stress. He, the most unfanatical, the most anti-fanatical of men, living at a moment when the supranational ideal was taking a solid hold upon European thinkers, had to witness one of the wildest outbreaks of national and religious mass-passion that history has ever had to relate. In general, those events which we are wont to deem of great historical importance hardly enter the sphere of popular consciousness. Even the huge waves of the earlier wars merely touched the outside marge of folk-life and were confined within the borders of those nations or those provinces which happened to be



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engaged in them. Moreover, the intellectual part of the nation can usually hold aloof from social or religious disturbances, and with undivided mind contemplate the welter of passion on the political stage. Goethe was such a figure. Undisturbed amid the tumult of the Napoleonic campaigns, he quietly continued his work. Sometimes, however, at rare intervals through the centuries, antagonisms reach such a pitch of tension that something is bound to snap. Then a veritable hurricane stampedes over the earth, rending humanity in sunder as though it were a flimsy cloth the hands could tear apart. The mighty cleft runs athwart every country, every town, every house, every family, every heart. From every side the individual is attacked by the overwhelming force of the masses, and there is no means of protection, no means of salvation from the collective madness. A wave of such magnitude allows no one to stand up firmly against it. Such all-encompassing cleavages may be brought about by social, religious, or other problems of a spiritual and theoretical nature. But so far as bigotry is concerned, it matters little what fans the flames. The only essential is that the fire should blaze, that it should be able to discharge its accumulated store of hate; and precisely in such apocalyptic hours of human folly is the demon of war let loose to gallop madly and joyously throughout the lands.

In such terrible moments of mass intoxication and sundering of the world of mankind, the individual is utterly helpless. It is useless for the wise to try and withdraw into the isolation of passive contemplation. The times drag him willy-nilly into the fray, to right or to left, into one clique or into another, into this party or into that. No one, then, needs a greater supply of courage than he who would fain take a middle course; he must be strong and resolute, denying himself to every party, steadfastly keeping a level head and preserving indepen-

dence of thought. At this point the curtain rises upon Erasmus's personal tragedy. He was the first German reformer, and I might truthfully say the only one (for the others were revolutionaries rather than reformers), to try and bring fresh life into the Catholic Church by means dictated by the laws of reason. But he who was essentially the far-visioned man of intellect, the evolutionary, had as antagonist in the arena of destiny, a man of action, a revolutionary, Luther, an emanation of the dark, daimonic forces of the Germanic peoples. Dr. Martin Luther's heavy peasant fist destroyed at one blow all that Erasmus's delicate penmanship had so onerously and tenderly put together. The Christian and European world was, consequently, hopelessly divided for centuries thereafter, so that Catholic was opposed to Protestant, northerners to southerners, Germans to Latins. At that time only one choice, one decision was open to the people of Germany and to western civilization: to be either papist or Lutheran, to obey either the power of the keys or the words of Holy Writ. Erasmus, to his praise be it said, remained the only leader of his epoch who refused to take sides. He neither espoused the cause of the Church nor that of the Reformation, for he felt bound to both: to evangelical teaching, since he himself had so long demanded a careful study of Scripture and had done all in his power to make the Gospels available to the people at large; and to the Catholic Church, since in her he saw the last remaining form of spiritual unity standing solid in a crumbling world. To right of him was exaggeration and to left was exaggeration, to right he saw fanaticism and to left; and he, the intractable anti-fanaticist, desired to serve neither one form of excess nor the other. His only master had always been fair-mindedness, and this master alone would he obey. It was in vain that he endeavoured to save the universal heritage of culture and civilization from wan-



ton destruction, remaining as mediator in the middle of the fray, thus taking up the most dangerous of positions. With his bare hands he tried to mix fire and water, to reconcile this fanatic with that opposing one—to no purpose, for such reconciliations are impossible of achievement. All the greater honour to Erasmus for the attempt. At the outset the two camps could make neither head nor tail of his attitude; he addressed them gently, and each side hoped to win him over. Neither side realized that here was a man who refused to pay homage to an opinion which he considered erroneous, refused to champion a dogma that was alien to his mind, so that each in turn heaped hatred and derision upon Erasmus's head. Because he could not attach himself to either party, he fell foul of both, saying ruefully: "The Guelphs call me a Ghibellin and the Ghibellins retaliate by saying I'm a Guelph." Luther, the Protestant, fulminated curses against him; the Catholic Church placed his books upon the Index. Yet neither threats nor vituperation could deviate Erasmus from his path, and induce him to rally to one party or the other. *Nulli concedo*, to neither shall I belong, such was his motto until the end; *homo per se*, man as man, with utmost consistency. In Erasmus's estimation, the duty of the artist and the man of intelligence was to act as sympathetic mediator between the politicians, and the leaders and mis-leaders of a one-sided passion; he was to be the man of moderation who worked towards the golden mean. He was not to rally to either standard, but was to stand alone against the common enemy of liberal-minded thinkers—against fanaticism. He was to take his place, not apart from the factions (for the artist, the man of reflective mind, must be sympathetic to all the outlooks of mankind), but above the battle, fighting with equal valour against one form of excess as against another, and against the accursed and unreasonable hate which is universally prevalent.



Such was Erasmus's attitude in his day and time, an attitude which his contemporaries looked upon as cowardly, saying that he was a Laodicean and a trimmer. To be quite honest we have to admit that Erasmus did not, as did Winkelried, rush towards the enemy and gather their spears together against his breast to fall pierced through by the hostile enemy. Such fearless heroism was not in his line. He stood aside prudently, and bent to right and to left like a reed in the storm; he acted thus because he had no wish to be broken, and so that in the interludes of calm he might rise again. Not for him to carry his independence, his *nulli concedo*, like a monstrance before him, but to hide it as a thief's dark-lantern beneath his cloak. He crept away into corners and on to devious paths during the wildest outbursts of popular madness; but—and this is what proves of greatest importance—he kept his spiritual treasure, his belief in mankind, intact and brought it safely out of the terrible storm of hate which raged around him; and it was from this tiny flame that Spinoza, Lessing, and Voltaire, not to mention all the "good Europeans" who trod the same road, were able to kindle their lamps. No clansman could have been more faithful to his tribe than was Erasmus, alone in his generation, leal to the whole of mankind. Though he kept aloof from the battlefield, though he owed allegiance to no army, though he was an outlaw and died alone, forsaken by everyone, he retained his independence—he was free.

History, however, is invariably unjust to the vanquished; she does not appreciate men of moderation, men who play the rôle of mediators, men who act as reconcilers, in a word humane men. She loves men of passion, the immoderate, the adventurers in the realms of deed and of thought. Thus, in the case of this quiet servitor of the humanities, she has passed him by with her nose in the air. Erasmus takes a back place on the

immense canvas of the Reformation. His contemporary reformers play out their destinies to a dramatic end—John Huss was consumed in flames, Savonarola burned (though after hanging) in Florence, Servetus was thrust into the fire by Calvin the zealot. Each lived through his hour of tragedy: Thomas Munzer was tortured to death with red-hot pincers; John Knox died prematurely from the hardships to which he had been subjected; while Luther, straddling the German earth with his sturdy peasant legs, declared, in defiance of emperor and empire, "Thus can I and no otherwise"; Thomas More and John Fisher were beheaded; Zwingli died on the battlefield, slain by his own compatriots, and his body was subsequently burned, his ashes strewn to the winds. All these are unforgettable figures, valiant in belief, ecstatic in martyrdom, great under the bludgeonings of fate. But in their trail the desolating flames of religious mania spread far and wide; the devastations of the Peasants' War are witnesses to the zealots' misinterpretation of Christ's teaching; the ruined towns, the plundered farmsteads of the Thirty Years War—the apocalyptic landscapes are clamorous of human unreason and of a refusal to yield. In the midst of this orgy, however, slightly in the rear of the mighty captains of the ecclesiastical warfare, and holding conspicuously aloof from them, the delicate face of Erasmus, faintly tinged with melancholy, gazes at us from the shadows. He does not stand bound to the martyr's stake, his hand is not armed with a sword, nor does passion disfigure his countenance. But his eyes are lifted serenely upward, those blue eyes, so sparkling and tender, which Holbein has immortalized for us, gaze over and beyond the tumultuous passion of his own day into the no-less moving epoch in which we live. His brow is shadowed by resignation—ah, how well he knew the everlasting "stultitia" of his fellow men! But around his mouth

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plays a gentle smile of certitude, for he, experienced as he was, knew only too well that passion lives for a day in the æons of time and then grows tired and is extinguished. Fanaticism is fated to overreach its own powers. Reason is eternal and patient, and can afford to bide her time. Often, while the drunken orgy is at its highest, she needs must lie still and mute. But her day dawns, and ever and again she comes into her own anew.



## Chapter 2

### A GLIMPSE AT THE EPOCH

THE transition from the fifteenth century to the sixteenth was a fateful period in the destinies of Europe, and in its dramatic succession of events is only comparable with the times in which we live. All in a moment Europe enlarged her frontiers so as to encompass the whole earth, discovery followed upon discovery, and within a few years the adventurous spirits of a new generation of mariners achieved what those of previous centuries had passed over out of indifference or from lack of initiative. Dates succeed one another like the minutes on an electric clock: in 1486 Diaz was the first European to reach the Cape of Good Hope; in 1492 Columbus sailed to the West Indian islands; in 1497 Sebastian Cabot discovered Labrador and thus reached the American mainland. The world had been enriched by a new continent. Ere this, Vasco da Gama, having rounded the Cape of Good Hope, crossed the Indian Ocean to Calicut, opening up the sea-route to Hindustan; in 1500, Cabral discovered Brazil; in 1519 Magellan set forth upon the most noteworthy voyage, a voyage which was crowned with success—the first voyage man had ever made round the world, the voyage from Spain and home to Spain once more, though Magellan was killed on the journey. Martin Behaim made his “earth-apple”, which when it first appeared was looked upon as an unchristianly hypothesis and laughed at as the work of a fool; but in 1492 this globe was recognized as a correct representation of the earth,

so that adventurous deeds had given birth to the boldest thoughts. Between night and morning the round ball of our planet upon which man had so long dwelt but which hitherto had been a *terra incognita* to him, circling unknown through the stellar universe, had become a reality which any intelligent fellow might explore; the oceans, until then accepted as a wide expanse of blue water wrapped in mystery, had become a place of measurable elements highly serviceable to the human kind. European daring all at once found a natural vent in the ceaseless, the breathless race for the discovery of the cosmos. Every time the guns of Cadiz or of Lisbon greeted a homeward-bound galleon, an inquisitive crowd would gather round the harbour in order to learn of freshly discovered lands, to be told about strange birds, beasts, and men, and to be shown these wonders; with awe they gazed upon the amazing freights of silver and of gold; and into every corner of Europe news was carried informing the peoples that, thanks to the heroism and intelligence of these same peoples, Europe had become the focus and ruler of the whole earth; almost at the same time Copernicus was exploring the stellar universe; and all these fresh items of knowledge spread rapidly (owing to the recently acquired art of book-printing) into the towns and even into the remotest hamlets. Thus, for the first time in many centuries, Europe achieved a collective life that brought happiness and well-being to her peoples. Within the compass of one generation, the fundamental elements of human philosophy, the whole concept of space and time, took on another aspect and another value. The only other epoch comparable with this turn of the century is our own, with its sudden diminution of space and time by means of the telephone, wireless, automobile, and aircraft, through its abrupt change in the rhythm of life by discoveries and inventions.

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Such a sudden enlargement of the physical universe must inevitably exercise a mighty upheaval in the realm of the spirit as well. Each individual, whether he wills it or not, is obliged to think, to calculate, and to live in terms of a new dimension; but before the brain has had time to accommodate itself to these wellnigh inconceivable changes, the emotions have already suffered a metamorphosis, so that the initial reaction of the spirit is a restless bewilderment, partly brought about by anxiety and partly by a confused enthusiasm, with the results that men lose their bearings and kick aside the norms and the forms which hitherto have kept them under control. Suddenly all that has seemed sure and certain becomes a question for inquiry, the things of yesterday appear antiquated and outlived. Ptolemy's maps, which for twenty generations had been looked upon as an irremovable heritage, were, after Columbus's and Magellan's voyages, laughed at even by children; works upon the cosmos, astronomy, geometry, medicine, and mathematics, which for centuries had been studied and accepted as unimpeachable, were cast aside; all that had been was withered by the hot breath of a new era. An end could be made of the endless commentaries and disputations; the whilom authorities could be given the go-by as though they were discarded idols; the paper castles of the schoolmen fell down, and the panorama was henceforward unencumbered. A spiritual fever for knowledge and science arose because of this colossal transfusion of fresh blood into the European organism, and the rhythm quickened. Developments, which had been going ahead at a measured speed, were now goaded on, by this fever, to assume the characteristics of a stampede; everything that had hitherto been stationary was set in motion as if the earth had quaked. The ordering of human life, which had been carried on unaltered throughout the Middle Ages,



was shuffled about so that the lowly rose or the higher strata sank, as the case might be: the orders of chivalry disappeared; the towns assumed an importance they had never known; the peasantry were impoverished; commerce and luxury bloomed like a tropical vegetation, thanks to the fertilizing qualities of the gold brought over the ocean. The fermentation grew livelier; the social groupings were recast into new moulds, and resembled in a way our own social reconstructions which have followed in the wake of technical developments and brought about a too-sudden organization and rationalization. It was one of those moments when man is overwhelmed by the burden of his own creations and needs every iota of his strength if he is to get hold of himself again.

Not a zone of human organization escaped this cataclysm. Even the religious sentiment, that lowest layer of our spiritual kingdom, was searched out and prodded into activity by the events of this turn in the centuries and in the expansion of the civilized world. The Catholic Church had become petrified in its own dogma and like a solid rock had withstood every assault. Obedience, magnificent in the way it imposed itself upon Mother Church's children, had been the seal and legacy of the Middle Ages. The Authority of the Church stood aloft, brazen and puissant; from below the faithful gazed upward for a sign, breathlessly awaiting the holy word; no doubt was permitted to arise in respect of ecclesiastical truth, and should opposition rear its head the Church knew well how to vindicate her power; for a decree of excommunication could break the sword of an emperor, and an uplifted finger could strangle the words in a heretic's throat. Unanimous and humble devotion to Mother Church, implicit and innocent faith, bound peoples and races and classes, no matter how alien and hostile to each other they might be at heart, into one

magnificent community. The people of the Middle Ages possessed but one soul, the Catholic soul. Europe rested in the lap of her mother, the Church; sometimes she was lulled by mystical dreams, sometimes she roused herself, but invariably she returned to repose on the maternal breast, and any desire to see truth by way of knowledge and science was contrary to the spirit of the age. But then, for the first time, a feeling of restlessness entered the heart of the European community. People began to ask themselves why, since the secrets of the earth were being disclosed one by one, the divine mysteries, too, might not be elucidated. Sporadically the faithful rose from the knees of her to whom they had lifted meek eyes in reverence; a new courage of thought and questioning entered their being, and side by side with the explorers of unknown seas and continents, side by side with Columbus, Pizarro, Magellan, arose the generation of spiritual conquistadors who resolutely went forth to discover the infinite. The religious mind, which for centuries had been encased in dogma as wine is held inert in a sealed bottle, streamed forth like ether and penetrated the depths of the people as well as ecclesiastical councils. Even the masses wanted to requicken and change the world. Thanks to this all-conquering self-confidence, the people of sixteenth-century Europe no longer felt like tiny specks of dust thirsting after the dew of divine grace, but as the centre of variegated happenings, as strong caryatides sustaining the universe. Meekness and resignation changed into self-consciousness and proper pride; and it was this confidence in its own strength, this release of the senses from age-long trammels, which has acquired the name of the Renaissance. Shoulder to shoulder with ecclesiastical teaching we have, on the same footing, intellectual criticism; side by side with the Church we have the sciences. Another supreme power has been broken, or



at least its strength is diminished ; the humble and dumb humanity of the Middle Ages has been wiped out, and a new humanity arises which sets about inquiring and investigating with the same religious fervour it has formerly applied to its creed and its prayers. The cloisters which have been the refuge of those who thirst for knowledge yield place to the universities which, in almost every land, were simultaneously founded about this date. These become the fortresses of free investigation, sanctuaries for poets, for thinkers, for philosophers, for scientists, and for all who wish to study the workings of the human mind and to lay bare its secrets. The spirit is finding new fields in which to deploy its forces. Humanism endeavours to bring man once more in touch with the divine, without priestly intervention ; and gradually there emerges, tentatively at first, and then borne forward by the self-assertion of the masses, the world-shaking movement of the Reformation.

The turn of a century became an epochal event ; Europe had for a short space found one heart, one soul, one will, and one desire. In its unity, in itself as a whole, Europe felt itself paramount, and called upon by an incomprehensible urge to bring about further and yet further changes. The hour was propitious, unrest seethed in every land, anxiety and impatience filled every heart ; while over everything there loomed a mysterious search for the liberating word which would indicate the goal towards which all were to strive. Now or never was spirit to renew the world.

## Chapter 3

### YOUTH IN OBSCURITY

A REMARKABLE symbol for a man who was to become supranational, a genius belonging to the whole world, was that Erasmus had no mother country, no home. In a certain sense, he was born in void space. The name Erasmus Roterodamus was not bestowed on him by his father or his ancestors. It was an assumed name coined from the language of his adoption, not from the Dutch which was spoken habitually around him, but from the Latin he acquired in later days. The date of his birth is uncertain; though there is good reason to suppose that he was born round about 1466. Erasmus himself is to blame for the obscurity in which his early days are wrapped; he disliked talking about his beginnings, for he was not only an illegitimate child but the son of a priest. *Ex illicito et ut timet incesto damnatoque coitu genitus*, and what Charles Reade, in his celebrated work *The Cloister and the Hearth*, narrates concerning the childhood of Margaret Brandt's boy is the sheerest romance. Erasmus's parents died early; and, very naturally, the relatives wished the bastard to be reared as cheaply as possible. Luckily the Church is never loath to take charge of a youngster who seems of good promise. At nine years of age, little Desiderius (more truthfully, the Undesired!) was sent to school at Deventer and later to Hertogenbosch. In 1487 he entered the Augustinian monastery at Steyn, not so much from religious inclination as because that cloister happened to possess the finest library of classical literature the country could

boast of. In 1488 he discarded the monkish habit, though in 1492 he was ordained a priest by the bishop of Utrecht. His years in the cloister do not seem to have been passed so much in saving souls as in reading the classics and in studying the fine arts.

Few were ever to see him in his priestly array, and it needs a certain effort of the imagination to remember that this independent thinker and writer remained a member of the clerical order until the hour of his death. Erasmus was a master of the gentle art of turning aside from everything that might be unpleasant to him, and he could keep his personal freedom intact no matter what garb he wore or what outward discipline he was compelled to obey. Two popes granted him dispensations, though the pretexts for asking them were the flimsiest. He was thus dispensed from wearing his priestly robe, and, on the production of a medical certificate, was likewise dispensed from observing the prescribed fasts. Also, in spite of supplications, warnings, and even threats, he never for one single day returned to the monastery.

Herein we see one of Erasmus's most salient characteristics: he would not bind himself to anything or to anybody, neither to prince nor churl; even God's service he refused to undertake for long. An inner urge constrained him to remain free and subject to no one. He never whole-heartedly accepted the guidance of those set over him in authority; he did not feel that he owed allegiance to any court, to any university, to any profession, to any monastery, to any church, or to any town. And just as he preserved his intellectual freedom intact, so all his life long did he quietly but obstinately defend his moral liberty of action.

To this fundamental trait, and organically akin to it, must be added another: Erasmus was fanatically independent, though by no means a rebel or a revolutionary. Quite otherwise, since he scrupulously forbore



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from open conflict, preferring the rôle of a shrewd tactician and eschewing unnecessary opposition to the powers that be and to any form of mundane authority. He would rather compromise than fight, veiling his independence in preference to combating for it openly. Not like Luther did he doff his Augustinian habit, casting it aside with a dramatic and challenging gesture. No; Erasmus slipped quietly out of his monkish garb when no one was there to spy upon his action, having previously secured the necessary dispensation. Like his compatriot Reinecke Fuchs, he skilfully eluded every pitfall laid to entrap his independence. Too prudent ever to become a hero, he acquired all that he needed for his personal development by means of his lucidity of mind and his profound knowledge of the foibles of human nature. Perpetually warring on behalf of his own freedom, he won the day, not by courage but by using the weapon of psychological understanding.

Now, the art of making one's life free and independent has to be learned—and this is a difficult task where an artist is concerned. Erasmus's schooling was both hard and wearisome. Ere he succeeded in running away from the cloister he was already six-and-twenty years of age, and yet for long he had found its restrictions and its narrow-mindedness intolerable. The first test of his diplomatic astuteness came when he made up his mind to leave St. Gregory's without having to break his vows, and, though determined to go, not to run away from his superiors disgraced and compromised. He therefore went to work secretly, and got the bishop of Cambrai to appoint him as Latin secretary for the journey to Italy this distinguished prelate was then preparing. Erasmus thus became initiated into court life at Brussels, and, in the very year Columbus discovered America, the captive

who had escaped from cloistral confinement discovered Europe, the ground for his future activities. As good luck would have it, the bishop postponed his journey and his protégé secured ample leisure to arrange his days according to his own taste: he no longer was obliged to say Mass; he sat at an ample board and ate the food that suited his delicate digestion; he conversed with men of learning; he set himself to study the Latin classics and the Fathers with passionate eagerness; and busied himself besides with writing his *Antibarbari*. Such was the name of his first book, and it might appropriately have stood on the title-page of all his subsequent works. Without realizing the fact, he had begun the great campaign which was to engage his energies until his death, the fight against ignorance, folly, and traditional presumption. During this lengthy struggle, his own moral code gained precision, and his learning became more extended. After some hesitation, the bishop gave up the idea of going to Rome, so that a Latin secretary was no longer required, and the beautiful days would automatically come to an end: the monk should obediently return to his cloister. But since Erasmus had now drunk the sweets of freedom, he was determined to go on sipping the delightful cup and never desist. He cajoled his patron into sending him to Paris University that he might study for the degree of Doctor of Theology. The bishop granted this request, and gave Erasmus in addition a small pension, whereupon the young cleric departed with his protector's blessing. The prior of St. Gregory's at Steyn vainly awaited the return of his undutiful son. Well, he must e'en get used to waiting, for the years and the decades passed by and Erasmus never went back, for Erasmus had taken leave of monastery and habit and every form of coercion for good and all.

The stipend granted by the bishop of Cambrai was certainly a meagre one for a full-grown student of thirty,



and Erasmus, in bitter mockery, christened his thrifty patron "Antimæcenus." He who had so rapidly acquired his freedom and had grown accustomed to the lavish table of the episcopal household, had now to make the best of his more austere quarters in the *domus pauperum* of the notorious Collège Montagu, whose rigid rules and ascetic discipline, together with the severity of its head, the reformer Jan Standonck, were uncongenial to Erasmus's temperament. This celebrated institution was situated in the Latin Quarter, on the Mont Saint Michel, approximately on the site where the Panthéon stands to-day. It was a veritable prison-house of the mind, constraining young and eager students in their wish to acquire learning and secluding them from their comrades in the mundane life without its walls. Erasmus writes of this period as a sentence of imprisonment, a period passed in a theological gaol, a waste of the best days of his youth. Our scholar, who for his epoch possessed extraordinarily modern ideas of hygiene, complained in his letters of one evil after another: the dormitories were insanitary: the rooms were icy cold and too near the latrines; no one could survive for long in this "vinegar college" without falling sick or dying. The food, too, aroused his criticism: the eggs and meat were foul, the wine was sour. Parasites abounded, so that the nights were a horror. In his *Colloquia* he asks derisively: "Do you come from Montagu? Then undoubtedly you were crowned with laurels?"—"No, with fleas!" Nor was corporal punishment lacking, and what Loyola the fanatical ascetic had gratefully endured during twenty years for the good of his soul, proved highly obnoxious to a sensitive and independent man like Erasmus. Even the tuition offended his taste, for he had already detected the smell of decay in the formalism of the schoolmen, with its Talmudic flavour and hair-splitting. The artist in him was disgusted, not perhaps

so profoundly as was at a later date Rabelais, but Erasmus despised scholastic methods with equal intensity, hating their everlasting endeavour to fit the mind to the bed of Procrustes. "None can disentangle the mysteries of this science, none at least who has once frequented the Muses and the Graces. All that you have learned about *bonæ litteræ*, you must forget, and that which you have drunk at the fountains of Helicon you needs must vomit forth again. I try not to say a single word of Latin, a single word that pleases or that may pass as witty, and I am making such progress in this endeavour that maybe on a day to come they will recognize me as one of themselves." At last illness came to his aid. This furnished Erasmus with a pretext for escaping from the galleys of Montagu, which kept mind and body in chains. Abandoning the idea of working for his degree of Doctor of Theology, he went away to recuperate. After a while he returned to Paris, no longer to dwell in the *Collège vinaigre*, but in private quarters, where he eked out the episcopal pittance by taking pupils from among the German and English families residing in the capital. The independent artist was coming to birth in the body of the priest.

But at an epoch that was more than half under the influence of the Middle Ages there was no place for a man of independent mind. The estates of the realm were still graded in very definite classes, so that the mundane and ecclesiastical princes, the clerics, the guildsmen, soldiers, officials, handicraftsmen, and peasants, formed groups of individuals separate and apart, and were severely kept from mixing. For the intellectuals, for creative artists, for the learned, for painters, for musicians, no niche as yet existed, since fees in payment of such work as these produced had not yet been invented.



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A man of intellect had no choice but to find a patron among the ranks of the ruling castes, so that he was obliged to serve a prince or else to serve God. Since art had not yet become an independent occupation, the artist had to seek the favour of the mighty, had to become the protégé of a gracious master, had to hunt up a sinecure here or a pension there, had—until Haydn and Mozart's day—to be content to sit below the salt and count himself no better than a domestic. If he did not want to starve, he had to write flattering dedications to the vain, frighten the timid by virulent pamphlets, wheedle money out of the wealthy with begging letters. Forever faced by insecurity, through one benefactor or through many, he had to wage incessant and undignified warfare to secure his daily bread. Ten, and maybe twenty, generations of artists lived from hand to mouth in this way, from Walter von der Vogelweide down to Beethoven—who was the first of the great creators to demand his rights as artist and the first to exercise these rights ruthlessly. But to a man of Erasmus's determined and satirical character such outward humility, such apparent acceptance of patronage, did not imply any considerable sacrifice of his proper pride. Early he saw through the illusion of mundane society. Since he was no rebel, he bowed to existing laws without complaint, his only endeavour being to seek ways and means deftly to evade them. But his road to success was a wearisome and inconspicuous one until his fiftieth year; his lot was far from enviable, living as he did on doles from the rich and begging his way as best he might. Even when his hair was grey, he was forced to hang his head and eat the bread of charity. Endless are his dedications, his flattering epistles which form a major part of his correspondence and could well become the text-book of those who should wish to learn the craft of writing begging letters; subtle and cunning as they are to the verge of a



fine art. Yet behind this lack of pride—a lack many have deplored—there lay concealed a resolute and magnificent independence of mind. If he paid flattering compliments in his letters, it was that he might more openly unveil the truth in his books. Though he accepted gifts from anyone willing to bestow them, he never put himself up for auction; everything that might make a claim upon him and bind him to a master, he thrust aside. Having earned international fame as a man of learning, there were dozens of universities which would fain have offered him a professorial chair; but he preferred to work quietly in Venice correcting proofs for Aldus's printing-house, or acting as tutor and travelling companion to sprigs of the English aristocracy, or living upon the bounty of acquaintances, just as long as it pleased him to do these things and never in any case for long at a time. He consistently refused to barter reputation for honours. This obstinate and resolute desire to preserve his cherished independence, this refusal ever to serve anyone, converted Erasmus into a lifelong nomad. He was always wandering from place to place, passing through Holland, England, Italy, Germany, and Switzerland. Of all the wise men of his age, he was probably the most travelled, never actually destitute, never wealthy, always (like Beethoven) living "in the air." Nevertheless this wandering existence was more akin to his true nature than ever house and home could have been. Better for him to be secretary to a bishop for a while, than himself to be a bishop for all eternity; better act as counsellor to a prince at so many ducats a year, than himself to be the high and mighty treasurer who paid out the allotted salary. A deep-lying instinct drove this man of wide attainments to fight shy of any form of career or position of power. What he needed was to work in the shadows while another wielded power, he himself holding aloof from responsibility, reading note-

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worthy books within the four walls of a quiet room, writing works of his own invention, to no man subservient, beholden to none—such was Erasmus's notion of an ideal existence. In the attainment of intellectual and spiritual freedom he wandered by many and devious paths, always with the same end in view: complete independence of thought, the better to pursue his calling and the better to run his own life.

It was during his first stay in England, when in his thirtieth year, that Erasmus discovered his true sphere of activity. Up to that time he had lived in the stuffy atmosphere of the cloister among narrow-minded and plebeian companions. The spartan discipline of the seminary and the intellectual bigotry of the schoolmen acted on his highly-strung nerves like veritable instruments of torture. His mind, inquisitive and all-embracing, could not properly develop in such an atmosphere. Yet the gall and vinegar he drank may have been necessary in order to create a thirst in him for far-flung knowledge and freedom, since beneath the yoke of discipline Erasmus learned to hate as unworthy of human civilization everything that savoured of narrow-mindedness, of doctrinaire partisanship, everything that was violent and dictatorial. Because Erasmus of Rotterdam had had personal experience of the worst side of the Middle Ages, because its steel had bitten into his vitals during his cloistral life, he felt impelled to go forth as herald of the new times. One of his pupils, young William Blount, Baron Mountjoy, invited Erasmus to visit England in the spring of 1499. Now for the first time he could breathe freely and happily in the cultured atmosphere his spirit craved. He came to the island in a fortunate hour, when England was basking in the sunshine of peace after the endless warfare between the red rose and the white.

Wherever the weapons of battle or of politics have been laid aside, there on that ground will the arts and sciences have an opportunity for freer development. Here, again for the first time, the insignificant pupil and teacher, coming straight from the seclusion of the monastery, was to learn that there are certain spheres where mind and knowledge are the ruling powers. No one troubled to ask him about his illegitimate birth, or to inquire whether he had said Mass and pattered off the prescribed number of prayers. The only thing which interested the people he associated with was his intellectual calibre, the fact that he was an artist, that he spoke a fluent and elegant Latin, that he was an amusing conversationalist. He mixed with the best of the land and was fully appreciated for what he was worth. Glad at heart, he made acquaintance with the amazing hospitality and the noble-minded spirit of fair play of *ces grands Mylords*, the English, with their *accords, beaux et courtois, magnanimes et forts*, as Ronsard expresses it. While in this unknown land, Erasmus discovered that there were other ways of thinking than those to which he had grown accustomed. Although John Wyclif had long since been gathered to his fathers, the freer theological discussions he had introduced still blew as a fresh current of sweet air through the colleges at Oxford; here he found scholars conversant with Greek, a language he had never studied; the finest brains were at his disposal, the greatest men were counted among his patrons and friends. Even the Prince of Wales, later to become king under the title of Henry the Eighth, asked that the insignificant little priest should be presented to him. For then and always it was to Erasmus's honour as a sign of the good impression he created, that the noblest men of his time and generation, such as Thomas More and John Fisher, were among his intimates, and that John Colet, together with Bishops Warham and Cranmer, were his patrons. Our young



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humanist eagerly inhaled the current of free intellectual air, utilizing this period of hospitality to widen his attainments in every direction, while by associating with the peerage and the circles of aristocratic men and women his deportment and manners were greatly improved. Consciousness of his own powers and the position these procured for him, brought about a speedy transformation in the erstwhile humble seminarist, changing him into a dignified cleric who wore his cassock as though it were a mundane ceremonial robe. Erasmus determined to become a man of parts, so he learned to ride and to follow the hounds; it was due to his consorting with men and women of refinement, nobles, aristocrats, and gentlemen, that Erasmus stood out from among his German brethren, rough-hewn and provincial in their ways, as a person of distinction and culture. During his stay in England he was in the midst of the political world, was on familiar terms with the moving spirits in Church and Court, so that his alert and penetrating vision gained in breadth and universality. This is what was later to win for him so great a renown. At the same time, he passed through a period of cheerfulness, writing to a friend: "Thou askest me whether I like England? If thou hast ever believed what I tell thee, I prithee believe me when I say that never has anything done me so much good. The climate is agreeable and wholesome, and the like may be said of the land's culture and knowledge; nor is this of a hair-splitting and jejune type; but, rather, is it profound, exact, and along classical lines, includes both the Latins and the Greeks; so that though there be some few things I should like to visit in Italy I have no active longing to go there for the present. When I hearken to my friend Colet, it seems to me that I am listening to Plato himself; and has nature ever produced a kinder, gentler, happier creature than Thomas More?" England, in fact, cured Erasmus of the Middle Ages.

Still, in spite of his affection for England, he never became an Englishman. He returned from his visit freed from trammels, a cosmopolitan and man of the world, independent and universalist in mind. Henceforward he gravitated towards those circles where culture, education, books, and science were dominant. For him the cosmos was no longer divided up into different countries whose frontiers were formed by rivers or by seas; no longer for him did the estates of the realm or races or classes exist. He recognized but two strata of society, an upper, consisting of the aristocracy of the mind, and a lower, plebeian, barbaric stratum which comprehended the remainder of mankind. Wherever books and educated speech, his *eloquentia et eruditio*, prevailed, there from this time on he found his home.

So stubborn a determination to ignore any but those who belonged to the aristocracy of the mind rendered Erasmus's personality somewhat vague, and cut the roots from beneath his work. As a genuine citizen of Cosmopolis he was everywhere a visitor, a guest, never assimilating the manners and customs of any specific people, and never acquiring a single living language. During his innumerable journeyings to and fro, he turned a blind eye to all that was peculiar to the country he happened to be traversing. Italy, France, Germany, England had, so far as he was concerned, only a dozen or so inhabitants each, with whom he conversed in elegant and polished Latin. A town consisted of its library, and he invariably selected the cleanest inns, where mine host received him the most courteously, and served him the best wines. He knew practically nothing save book-lore, possessing neither an eye for paintings nor an ear for music. The works of Leonardo, Raphael, Michelangelo, passed unnoticed before his



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gaze, and he looked upon papal enthusiasm for the arts as unnecessary extravagance and as mere love of display totally alien to the spirit of the Gospels. He read neither the strophes of Ariosto, nor Chaucer's great works, nor any of the French poets. Latin, alone, was as music in his ears; Gutenberg's printing was the only art he recognized, the only one of the Muses he felt bound to by the ties of kinship, he, the subtlest type of the man of letters, to whom the content of the world was made intelligible through *litteræ*, through literature alone. He could get into touch with reality by no other means than through the medium of books, and he certainly had more intercourse with them than he ever had with women. For books he had a great love because they made no noise, were not domineering, could not be understood by the "dull masses," and were the sole privilege of the educated in an epoch when privilege had ceased to play a part. In this sphere he, who was by habit of a thrifty disposition, could act with largesse; and when he sought to obtain money by a dedication he did so uniquely on account of his desire to purchase books, and ever more books, the Latin and Greek classics. Erasmus loved books, not merely for their contents, but also for their material selves, he being the first thoroughgoing bibliophile. He worshipped their form, he liked handling them, he admired their artistic presentation. His moments of sheerest happiness were those passed at Aldus's printing-house in Venice, or with Frobenius in Basle, standing among the workers in the low-ceilinged room, receiving the galleys still damp from the press, setting up with the masters the delicate and beautiful initial letters, running to earth like an expert huntsman with swift and finely-pointed quill the most elusive of printers' errors, deftly rounding off a clumsy phrase; to be with books, dealing with them, working at them—this seemed to him the most natural form of existence. Thus



Erasmus never lived among the peoples whose lands he travelled through, never shared in their life and activities; he dwelt above them, in the clear still ether, in the ivory tower of the artist and academician. But from this tower, which was built entirely of books and labour, he gazed forth, keen of sight like another Lynceus, in order to see and to understand clearly and correctly the teeming life below.

To understand, and to understand better, this was the special pleasure of this amazing genius. Erasmus was not, perhaps, a man of profound mind in the strict meaning of the phrase; he did not think his thoughts out to their logical conclusion, he did not belong to the ranks of the great reformers who endowed the world with a wholly new planetary universe of the intellect. Erasmus's truths are possibly no more than clarifications. Still, if he lacked depth he compensated this by the width of his vision; if he was not a profound thinker he was certainly a correct thinker, a clear thinker, and a free thinker in Voltaire's and Lessing's sense, the prototype of those who understand and make others understand, an "enlightener" in the noblest interpretation of the word. He deemed it his natural vocation in life to bring clarity and frankness into the realm of thought. Everything that was muddled antagonized him; he disliked the mystical and the metaphysical; like Goethe, he hated all that was nebulous. Wide horizons lured him, but he was not attracted towards the deep. He never bent over to contemplate the abyss as did Pascal at a later date; not for him the spiritual earthquakes of a Luther, a Loyola, or a Dostoevsky, those terrifying crises bordering on madness and presaging death. Exaggeration and excess remained foreign to his eminently rational mind. No man of his period was so free from superstition as Erasmus. May

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he not often have smiled quietly to himself when he witnessed the spiritual contortions and crises of his contemporaries? Savonarola's visions of hell, Luther's panic at the sudden apparition of the devil, Paracelsus's astral fantasies, must have amused Erasmus greatly, since he himself was capable only of understanding and making comprehensible to others that which was universally understandable. His first glance at a problem brought clarity; and whatever his eyes beheld, immediately became lucid and orderly. Thanks to this lucidity of his thought-process and his emotional penetration, he became the greatest elucidator, critic, educator, and teacher of his day—not a teacher of his generation alone, but of subsequent generations likewise, for the men of the Enlightenment, the Free-thinkers, the Encyclopædists of the eighteenth century and many a pedagogue of the nineteenth, were sibs to his mind.

Unfortunately, in everything that is sensible and instructive there lies embedded the danger of a lapse into the humdrum, and we must not indict Erasmus because the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries declined into an exaggerated rationalism since it merely aped his methods while wandering far away from the spirit of his teaching. These wretched pygmies lacked the pinch of Attic salt, that sovereign and refined wit, that pre-eminent independence of thought, which makes his own letters and dialogues so entertaining and so full of literary savour. In Erasmus's writings we find a cheerful humour making the scales even with a more ponderous erudition. He was strong enough to play with his own intellectual potency. Above all he combined a sparkling and yet by no means malicious wit, a caustic yet by no means icy humour which Swift was to inherit, and which, later, was to become characteristic of Lessing, Voltaire, and Shaw. As the leading stylist writer of his day, Erasmus possessed the art of presenting certain

truths in a racy and brilliant way; with consummate adroitness and genial impertinence he gave the go-by to the censorship, so that many a naughtiness escaped the reproving eye; he was in reality a dangerous rebel who managed never to put himself in danger, seeking refuge behind his professorial robes or deftly assuming the fool's motley. For uttering the tenth part of what Erasmus ventured to say and write, others would have been sent to the stake merely because they expressed roughly what he conveyed with the most delicate of rapier thrusts. His books were acceptable to popes and princes of the Church, to kings and dukes alike; they brought, indeed, to their author munificent gifts and the highest honours. Erasmus packed his wares so cunningly that he was able, unbeknownst, to smuggle all the contraband of the Reformation into cloister and court. He was the initiator—along every route he was a pioneer—of that political prose, ranging from lyrical eloquence to the lampoon, of that art of expressing in winged words the needs of the time, which at a later date was to be so splendidly perfected by Voltaire, Heine, and Nietzsche, an art which made jovial fun of principalities and powers, and which proved so immensely more effective than the open and ponderous attacks of other reformers. Thanks to Erasmus, the man of letters for the first time became something to reckon with, a power in Europe which the other powers must take into consideration. And, since he used his power to unite instead of to disintegrate, for the common weal rather than to create rivalries and antagonisms, he has earned our lasting gratitude.

Erasmus was not at the start an outstanding author. A man of his kind needs to be advanced in years ere he can influence the world about him. Pascal, Spinoza, Nietzsche, could afford to die comparatively young because they were men of compact intelligence and their thoughts could find expression in the most condensed



form. An Erasmus, however, who was a seeker, a collector, a commentator, and a compromiser, could not find his material within himself but had to pick it up in the exterior world. His genius was not intensive but extensive. He was a man of acquirements, a "knowledgeable man," rather than an artist in the pure sense of the term. His ready intelligence made what he wrote seem to be a conversation, easy, expressive, pungent; and he, himself, once declared that the composing of an entire book cost him less effort than correcting one signature of proof. No need for stimulation where he was concerned; his mind worked swiftly and accurately without needing the goad; words came more speedily than his pen could set them down. Zwingli wrote to him: "As I read, it seemed to me that I could hear you speaking, and could see your small and dapper figure moving about before me in the pleasantest manner." The lighter his vein, the more convincing did he become; and the more he wrote, the greater was his influence.

The first of his books to bring him fame was *Adagia*, and it was by chance that this collection of adages was brought together. It coincided with the taste of the learned world of the epoch, and was full of apt and recondite sayings, enlivened at times with telling comment and bracing anecdote. He had been jotting down these maxims for many years and had used them for his pupils' benefit. The work had been published in Paris in 1500, and very soon obtained a wide circulation. It suited a peculiar form of intellectual snobbery which flourished at that time, for Latin was in its hey-day and every man of literary pretensions believed it necessary, in order to prove the excellence of his education, to pepper his letters or his lectures or his speech with Latin quotations. Erasmus's clever selection spared all and sundry the trouble of going to the original sources. No longer need the classics be read and ponderous tomes consulted.

When a letter had to be written, the snobs of the humanist movement had merely to lift a sparkling gem from the *Adagia*, and their turn was served. Since intellectual snobs have always been with us, and probably always will be, the work was a best-seller. A dozen editions followed in quick succession, each one improved and added to, so that the volume grew to be double its original size. It circulated in every country of Europe, and soon the bastard's name became so celebrated that Erasmus came into his own.

One single success, however, does not suffice an author. He has to repeat his triumph again and again to show that he possesses gifts sufficient to his vocation and befitting his position as an artist. Such a faculty is not a thing one can acquire by learning, and a writer never knows beforehand whether his next book is going to be a success or to fall flat. Erasmus did not consciously work for success, and each time that it came to him he was surprised anew. His *Colloquia*, a series of dialogues, was first written for his pupils as forms of polite address in the Latin tongue and with a view to facilitating their acquirement of the fashionable language. It was destined to become a text-book in the schools of subsequent generations. He penned *In Praise of Folly* as a satire, but the book let loose a revolution against all the authorities. When he set to work translating the New Testament from Greek into Latin, adding comments of his own, he brought into being a new theology. A woman, complaining to him of her husband's religious indifference, inspired him to write a book that should bring solace to her mind. In a few days the work was polished off—and it became the catechism of the new evangelical form of piety and devotion. Without taking aim, Erasmus almost invariably hit the bull's eye. What

## YOUTH IN OBSCURITY

moves a free and unprejudiced mind, invariably comes as something fresh and hitherto unheard of to those who are caught in the net of tradition; for he who thinks independently, thinks thoughts that are the best for all and advantage the multitude.



## Chapter 4

### LIKENESS

LAVATER, whose gifts as a physiognomist none will deny, wrote of Erasmus: "He has one of the most expressive countenances, one of the most decisive faces, I have ever seen." The great portrait painters of the day reacted to this "decisive" physiognomy, this "expressive" face, by drawing it over and over again. They valued it as a new type. Hans Holbein has left six portraits of the *præceptor mundi* at various ages; Albrecht Dürer, two; Quentin Matsys, one. No other German has so extensive an iconography as Erasmus. For it was considered an honour to be allowed to portray this *lumen mundi*, this "universal man," who had been able to unite into one brotherhood, to rally around the standard of humanistic culture, all the guilds of handicraftsmen practising the various arts. The painters paid homage to Erasmus as their protector, as the champion of the new ethical shaping of their existence, as the new inspirer of their muse; and they presented him on their canvases with all the insignia of this intellectual puissance. Just as the warrior is presented to us in helmet and armour, the noble with his escutcheon and motto, the bishop with his ring and crozier, so is Erasmus presented to us with the weapon he himself discovered: he is the man with the book. He is portrayed amidst an army of books, writing books, creating books. Dürer shows him with an inkhorn in his left hand and a pen in his right, folios and letters around him. Holbein at one time paints him with his hand resting on a book, and, symbolically, names the picture

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*The Labours of Hercules*—a clever piece of flattery worthy of Erasmus's titanic achievements; then, again, we see him with his hand on the head of the Roman god Terminus, as though a "concept" had at that very moment taken birth in his brain. Simultaneously with physical exactness of portraiture we are given the "fine, reflective, shrewdly apprehensive" (Lavater) depiction of his intellectual bearing. Invariably we are shown the thinker, the seeker, the self-prober, and it is this which imparts so great a vividness to an otherwise over-abstract countenance.

Were it not for the inner power reflected from his eyes, Erasmus's face, so far as physical contour is concerned, cannot be called a beautiful one. Nature was not lavish with her bodily gifts when she fashioned this man whom she so richly endowed with intellectual capacity; she was thrifty, too, in the matter of vitality and plenitude of life. His body was delicate, his head small instead of being solid, healthy, and resistant. He was emaciated, pale, and listless; no hot, red blood coursed through his veins. Over his sensitive nerves was stretched a thin, sickly skin, all the sallow because of his sedentary occupation within the four walls of stuffy rooms. As the years accumulated upon him, his skin grew ever more grey and brittle, so that it came to look like parchment, and was riddled with creases and wrinkles. What strikes the onlooker most is this constant repetition of a lack of vitality: hair sparse and not sufficiently pigmented, so that it lies in colourless blond wisps upon his temples; hands bloodless and transparent as alabaster; nose so pointed as to look like a bird's beak; lips too thin, too sibylline; voice, toneless; eyes, in spite of their luminosity, too small, and veiled. Nowhere do we see a strong colour glowing, nowhere a full, round contour in this ascetic and toil-worn countenance. It is difficult to picture the man as ever having been young,

as riding on horseback, as swimming and fencing, as joking with or even caressing a woman, as struggling against wind and storm, as conversing or laughing. The fine face, a monk's face, dried and pickled, calls up the picture of closed windows, over-heated rooms, dust from books, wakeful nights, and arduous days. No warmth or stream of energy radiates from this cool countenance; and, as a matter of fact, Erasmus was always cold, huddling himself in wide-sleeved, thick, fur-lined robes, cossetting himself against the slightest draught by wearing a velvet skull-cap upon his prematurely bald head. His face is the face of a man who never lived in real life, but who lived in thought, whose strength did not reside in his body, but inside the bone-case of the skull. Helpless when confronted with reality, Erasmus's true vital energies found expression in the achievements of his brain.

Erasmus's face has meaning for us only through the aura of intellect which surrounds it. That one of Holbein's portraits which depicts the thinker in his unique moment of creative activity is an incomparable, an unforgettable work of genius; from all the great painter's masterpieces, it stands apart: it is, perhaps, the most satisfying presentation in colours of a writer who is about to translate through the magic of his pen the abstract idea into the concrete visibility of the written word. Once we have seen this notable picture, it can never slip from our memory. Erasmus is standing before his writing-table, and one feels, to the very marrow of one's bones, that he is alone. His solitude is untroubled, it is absolute; the door in the background is closed against intruders; no one comes or goes within the confines of this narrow cell; but even if something were happening in his immediate neighbourhood, he would be unaware, for he is in the trance of creation, absorbed, silent, and still. He looks as if he were carved out of stone, so motionless is he; yet



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on closer inspection this repose is found to be fictitious, for inside the statue there is a very active life, taut concentration of mental alertness, so that the blue eyes blaze with a glow while the delicate, almost feminine hand, traces the letters and words which are to convey on to the paper the inner inspiration. His lips are tightly pressed together, his brow is unruffled and serene, his quill seems to glide along lightly and mechanically. Nevertheless a tiny fold between the eyebrows betrays the strain he is undergoing as he sets down his thoughts in well-turned phrases. The immaterial, almost imperceptible frown so near the creative centre of the brain shows how the man is struggling to find the aptest turn of phrase in which to couch the freshly invented adage. Thought, thereby, seems to become a corporeal phenomenon, and one realizes that everything in the man is tense and vibrant, flooded with a mysterious stream of silence. It is amazing the way in which Holbein succeeds in conveying the chemical transformation of energy which gives material shape to a purely spiritual material. For hours on end one can gaze at this picture, and lend an ear to listen to its all-pervading quietude—for by thus symbolically presenting Erasmus at work, Holbein has immortalized the divine earnestness of every intellectual creator and the invisible patience which is the asset of a genuine artist.

Holbein's portrait gives us Erasmus's quintessential being; through it alone can we come to realize the hidden power lying within the emaciated little body which, like the snail's shell—a burdensome and friable integument—accompanied the thinker throughout his earthly pilgrimage. During the seventy years of his life he was perpetually afflicted by bad health; for what nature had deprived him of in the way of muscle, she had supplied to excess in the matter of nerves. Even as a young man

he was neurasthenic ; maybe he was hypochondriacal, for his organs were supersensitive. The protective covering of health was too thin to secure him from assault, so that if he was not plagued with one petty ailment he was afflicted with another—slight, maybe, but undermining. His digestion gave him unceasing trouble ; his limbs were often racked with rheumatic pains or with gout ; he “suffered from the stone” ; every breath of keen air acted upon his delicate constitution like ice upon a decayed tooth ; he was sensitive to the slightest change of climate. In almost every one of his letters he complains of not feeling well. In no place did he feel at ease : heat undid him ; fog rendered him melancholy ; he detested the wind ; he shivered in the cold ; stove-heated rooms oppressed him and made his head ache ; stuffy air gave him nausea. Though he swathed himself in furs and thick woollens, he could not warm his frail body. By no means inclined to pamper his appetites, he was obliged, in order to conserve a modicum of health, to allow himself certain indulgences. He needed to be particular as to what he drank, and the wines of Burgundy were the only ones capable of whipping up his chilly blood into a semblance of warmth. He was obliged to eschew beer, and the vintages of Baden and the Rhine, these latter being too sour for his delicate digestion. An Epicurean by nature, Erasmus fought shy of badly prepared food, his stomach refusing to assimilate indifferent meat, while the smell of fish revolted him. Such constitutional frailty rendered a certain degree of physical comfort indispensable. He needed soft, warm materials for his attire ; a clean bed ; costly wax candles instead of the usual dip. Every journey he undertook was for him an unpleasant adventure, and what he tells us of his experience of German inns is not only entertaining in the extreme but highly instructive as to the manners and customs of the day. During his sojourn in Basle he had, day after day,



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to make a detour in order to avoid a peculiarly evil-smelling street, for every form of stench, of noise, of garbage, of reek, of rudeness and of tumult afflicted his mind as well as his body and wrought his soul up to the pitch of murderous frenzy. Once, in Rome, some friends took him to witness a bull-fight. He was utterly nauseated by the spectacle, declaring: "I have no liking for such bloody sports, they are relics of barbarism." His tenderness of heart made him revolt at any lapse from civilization. In an epoch of gross physical negligence, he was a solitary hygienist and sought to bring into being such cleanliness as he brought into his style as artist and author. His more modern outlook, his more highly-strung temperament, made him far outstrip his rougher, thicker-skinned, iron-nerved contemporaries in matters of hygiene and sanitation, thus anticipating the improvements of a later day. His greatest dread was that he should be attacked by the plague which was raging throughout every land at that time, and causing terrible havoc. If he learned that the disease was epidemic in a region one hundred miles away, he shuddered with apprehension and decamped panic-stricken no matter whether the emperor had summoned him to a council or the most attractive proposal had been made to him. He felt personally humiliated if he found vermin upon him, or pimples, or a boil. This excessive concern regarding illness never left him all his life. Frank, as every practical man is, he was by no means ashamed of avowing that he "trembled at the merest mention of death," for, like all those who are good workers and enjoy the work they do, he was exasperated when some petty ailment came to hinder him; and precisely because he knew his own weaknesses very well indeed, he took every precaution lest his frail body should betray him. He shunned too generous hospitality, was specially attentive to cleanliness, saw to it that his food was carefully pre-



pared, would not allow Venus to lure him into excess, and, above all, refused to have anything to do with Mars, the god of war. As the years passed by, he increased his precautions, modifying his way of living in order to promote the welfare of his ageing body and thus foster an increase of the repose, security, and solitude he needed for his supreme pleasure—work. This painstaking adherence to hygiene and moderation, this resistance to the lure of the world of the senses, secured Erasmus from harm, so that, puny and ailing as he perpetually was, he managed to escape the ills from which so many of his contemporaries suffered during one of the wildest and most unwholesome periods in human history. He attained his seventieth year, keeping that which he most highly valued here below: his clarity of vision, and his unassailable freedom.

Such undue frailty, such oversensitiveness of every organ, is not calculated to produce a hero; such a habit of mind and body as that possessed by Erasmus cannot fail to be reflected in the physique; and we need but glance at any of his portraits to realize at once that he was a man unlikely to cut much of a figure as a martial leader in the turbulent days of the Renaissance and the Reformation. Lavater writes: "In his countenance there is no feature to lead one to suspect any unwonted courage or daring." The same may be said of his character. This gentle creature was not made to put up a fight; Erasmus could only defend himself like those small beasts which, when attacked, sham dead or save themselves by protective coloration. But his favourite method of resistance was simply to withdraw into his shell like a snail whenever the tumult raged around him. The safest shelter, then, was his study, behind a barricade of books. Here he deemed himself really secure. We feel what amounts to

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actual pain as we watch Erasmus's behaviour in hours when great issues were at stake, for whenever an issue became serious he slipped away out of the danger zone. He could never utter a plain "Yes" or "No," but would use the evasive terms "If" or "Insofar," thus baffling his friends and enraging his enemies. Any who should place faith in him as an ally would be pitifully let down. For Erasmus, being one of the great solitaries, could remain faithful to no one but himself. Instinctively he avoided making any decision because by doing so he would feel bound. Dante, the ardent partisan, would probably have placed Erasmus, on account of his tepidness, in that intermediate abode inhabited by those who had been "above the battle in the fight between God and Lucifer":

... that caitiff choir  
Of angels, who have not rebellious been,  
Nor faithful were to God, but were for self.

Every time Erasmus might have acted generously and with devotion, he sneaked away into an attitude of impartiality; for no idea in the world, for no conviction, could he be induced to place his head upon the block, and suffer for what he at heart knew to be true and right. Erasmus was just as much aware of this trait as were his contemporaries. He was only too willing to admit that neither his body nor his soul contained any of the material that goes to make up the martyr. Following in Plato's footsteps he had come to the conclusion that the most essential virtues of man were fair-mindedness and the capacity to yield. Courage, he maintained, played second fiddle. Erasmus showed, however, that he was a man of pluck, inasmuch as he was not ashamed to admit his pusillanimity—and this is a rare thing to find at any epoch. When he was reproached for his lack of bellicose courage he retorted with a smile: "Were I a Swiss

soldier, that might be a warranted reproof; but since I am a man of learning, and need tranquillity for my labours, it harmeth me not." An inimitable justification, and worthy of Erasmus's wit!

He was an inveterate worker; his brain, ceaselessly active, and as indefatigable and tough as his body was weakly, knew not a moment's fatigue, uncertainty, or assault from the earliest years to his dying hour. It invariably worked with a limpid and inspiring energy. Though his flesh and blood were hypochondriacal, his brain was that of a giant on the warpath. Three to four hours' sleep sufficed for recuperation; the remaining twenty hours were passed in ceaseless toil, writing, reading, arguing, collating, correcting. On his journeys he wrote; in the jolting postchaise he wrote; in every inn parlour the table was cleared for his work. To be awake was for him synonymous with being occupied with literary work, and his quill was as though it were a sixth finger to his hand. Ensnconced behind his books and his papers, he looked upon events as from a camera obscura, keenly and inquisitively, so that not a pamphlet or an occurrence in the field of politics escaped his notice. Through the medium of books and letters, he learned of all that was happening outside the walls of his study. The fact that this vast accumulation of knowledge was acquired indirectly by means of the written and printed word imparts a flavour of the academical to Erasmus's erudition, and gives a hint of abstract coldness to his writings. Just as his body lacked juice and full-blooded sensuality, so do his works. He saw with his mind's eye, not with his living and absorbing organ of sight; but his curiosity and his desire for knowledge embraced every sphere. Like a searchlight, his vision penetrated each problem of life, illuminating it with an equable and compassionate sharpness; his mind was a thoroughly modern thinking-machine of indescribable precision



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and amazing grasp. There was hardly a sphere of contemporary thought that his searching glance failed to irradiate: restless, exciting, and yet for ever clear, Erasmus's mind acted as the precursor and pioneer of what the minds of a later epoch were to convert into public knowledge. Erasmus possessed, as it were, a divining-rod, with which he discovered the underground springs that his fellows passed by unheeding. With an instinctive flair, he mined for the veins of gold and silver; but, when he had found the lode, his interest in the problem waned, and he left the wearisome task of boring, of cradling, and of valuing to those who should come after. This was his limitation—or maybe I should be wiser to say: this demonstrated the magnitude of his mental vision. Erasmus lighted up a problem: he never solved one. Just as the coursing blood of passion was lacking in his physical veins, so, in the intellectual sphere, he was devoid of the fanaticism which went to the extremes of moroseness and the fury of unreasoning partisanship: His universe was one of width rather than of profundity.

It is difficult indeed to pronounce judgment upon this essentially modern spirit, which at the same time transcends all epochs; we cannot measure Erasmus by the scope of his works, rather must we consider him from the angle of how great an influence he exercised. For his soul was made up of many layers, each consisting of a different talent, the whole a sum-total of endowments and yet failing to form a unity. He was at once bold and timid, pushing and irresolute when it came to the final blow, mentally combative, free-living where the heart was concerned, vain as a man of letters and yet humble outside that sphere, a sceptic and an idealist: these manifold inconsistencies and contrasts were loosely combined within himself. His ant-like diligence, his free-thinking theology, his severely critical attitude to the happenings

of the epoch, his gentleness as a teacher, his very modest achievement as poet, his brilliance as letter-writer, his sardonic humour, his tender apostleship of all that is human—there was room for these antinomies within the wide spaces of his mind, without rendering him oppressed or creating an inner antagonism, for the greatest of his talents—a capacity for uniting that which seemed irreconcilable, a capacity for resolving opposites—functioned as neatly within his own skin as upon the world without. But so many and so various inconsistencies do not make for unity, and that which goes by the name of “the Erasmian substance” or “the Erasmian idea” was stamped more profoundly upon and found more concentrated expression in his followers than in himself. The German Reformation, the Enlightenment, the unrestricted study of the Bible as contrasted with the satirical spleen of a Rabelais or a Swift; the European ideal and modern humanism—these are thoughts emanating from Erasmus’s brain, but are not due to any act on his part. Though he gave the initial impetus, and set the problem a-going, his own movement overtook and outstripped him. Men of understanding and penetration rarely accomplish anything in the world of concrete fact, for clarity and breadth of insight paralyse the physical impact. As Luther declares: “Seldom are good works undertaken with wisdom and prudence; everything occurs unconsciously. . . .” Erasmus was a shining light of his century, others had to furnish strength. He illuminated the way, others had to pass along it. Like all the springs of light, he himself remained in the shadow. Nevertheless, he who opens new paths, even though he does not himself tread them, is as worthy of our esteem as he who is the first to enter the tracks thus indicated for him. Those who labour in the realm invisible, they too have performed a deed.

## Chapter 5

### THE MASTER CRAFTSMAN

LUCKY the artist who discovers the true medium whereby to express in the most harmonious manner the results of his endowments. Thanks to the chance writing of *In Praise of Folly*, Erasmus found the medium best suited to his talents. The well-informed man of culture, the satirical mocker, and the keen critic who went to the making of Erasmus, here rubbed shoulders in the friendliest spirit of brotherly affection. No other work from his pen enables us to know Erasmus and to recognize his mastership so finely as does this, the most famous of his books and the only one that has wholly escaped the waters of oblivion. The bolt was shot into the very heart of the period in the most carefree and playful spirit. In seven days, and more to relieve his mind than for any other purpose, Erasmus composed this dazzling satire. But precisely the frivolity of the undertaking gave the author wings, so that he flew upward reckless and unconcerned. Erasmus was already more than forty, and was not only widely read and well practised with his pen, but was likewise a man who had penetrated deep into the human heart. He found it far from perfect, for reason possessed so little power as against reality, and the impulses seemed to him anything but sane. Everywhere he looked, he beheld

... desert a beggar born,  
And needy nothing trimm'd to jollity,  
And purest faith unhappily forsworn ...



## ERASMUS

And art made tongue-tied by authority . . .  
And simple truth miscall'd simplicity,  
And captive good attending captain ill . . .

so that, like Shakespeare, he felt tired of what he saw.

He who has long been poor, who has had to stand in the shadowed gateway of the mighty begging his bread, is apt to become bitter, to be as filled with gall as a wet sponge is with water. He has learned how unjust and foolish are his fellow mortals, and his lips are at times awry with anger as he smothers a cry of protest and scorn. At bottom, however, Erasmus was not a *seditiosus*, he was not a rebel, nor of a revolutionary disposition. Loud and dramatic complaints were not in his line, for he was essentially moderate and cautious. Erasmus had none of that simple and beautiful delusion which makes a man feel he can at one blow destroy all that is bad upon this earth. Why, then, asks Erasmus nonchalantly, spoil one's chances in respect of this world? Single-handed, a man cannot amend its evil ways; and, apparently, humanity's powers to delude others and itself are illimitable. Shrewdness advises us to let things alone; and the wise man will keep his wonted calm, glancing at this kaleidoscope of fussy and foolish activity and then pursuing his own road with a smile of disdain twisting his lips, the attitude of Dante's "look and pass."

Occasionally, however, even the wise man is beguiled into casting a severe and resigned glance into this whirlpool of stupidity; he must be in happy mood to be able to do so, and to smile indulgently at all this folly. Then his ironical smile will throw a searchlight into the world which will illuminate it and render it comprehensible. Coming back from Italy in 1509, Erasmus crossed the Alps. During his stay in Italy he had witnessed the complete religious decay that was rife within the Church; had seen the pope, Julius II, wishing to restore the

political and temporal powers of the papacy, himself leading his troops to the combat as boldly as any other *condottiere*; had known bishops who, instead of living in apostolic poverty, led lives of luxury and display; had beheld the iniquitous war-lust of the princes who governed this distraught land, and who attacked one another with the voracity of wolves; had looked upon the pride of the mighty, the horrible destitution among the common people. Yes, he had, indeed, gazed long and distressfully down into the abysmal depths of paradoxical absurdity. Now that lay behind him like a black cloud upon the sunny horizon of the Alps. Erasmus the learned, the bookworm, was ahorse; no longer, thanks be, did he drag a load of literary luggage in his rear, none of the codices and parchments which he delighted in commenting upon went with him on this journey. His mind was free to wanton in the free air, he wished to play and give vent to his high spirits. Chance, bright and bewitching as a butterfly, passed by and accompanied him for the remainder of this fortunate journey. Hardly had he settled down in Thomas More's cheerful mansion, when he began to write his witty little squib, mainly to entertain the circle of his friends. He christened his satire, on More's suggestion, *Moriæ encomium* (otherwise *Laus stultitiæ*, which is perhaps most happily translated, "In Praise of Folly").

Compared with his serious, influential, rather ponderous and highly scientific works, this small book, so full of impudence and ridicule, would seem to have been the outcome of youthful exuberance, a creature light of foot and willowy in figure. But a work of art does not need scope and weight to give it spiritual consistency; and just as in politics one word, one joke, may often have greater effect than the most eloquent speech of a Demosthenes, so in the realm of literature, it is not bulk that counts but content. Among the hundred and eighty

tomes bequeathed to us by Voltaire, *Candide*, that terse and mocking *nouvelle*, is the only one to survive hardily and remain of vital interest. So also, among the innumerable folios written by Erasmus's ready pen, this brilliant and spirited *Laus stultitiæ*, the child of a fortunate hour, is the one which still continues to amuse and edify us.

The masquerade Erasmus here depicts with such masterly art is unique, and never again was its author to recapture the genial humour with which it is presented. Erasmus does not in his own person utter the words which convey the bitter truths aimed at the mighty; he places Stultitia, Folly, in the pulpit, and from thence she eulogizes herself. An amusing *quid pro quo* is thus created, for the reader is never quite sure who is talking: is Erasmus speaking seriously, or is Folly, to whom the roughest and most impudent behaviour may be permitted, giving us a taste of her tongue? By assuming this ambiguous position, Erasmus renders himself unassailable and can permit himself to be as bold as he chooses. His personal opinion is never divulged, and should anyone fancy he can reproach the author for some peculiarly biting observation, or for the gibes which are lavishly sprinkled upon every page, Erasmus has it in his power to reply: "I never said anything of the kind. It was Dame Stultitia that spoke—and who is likely to take the words of a fool seriously?" Criticism of the manners and customs of an epoch when the censorship and the Inquisition flourished, was here smuggled into the world by means of irony and symbolism—and this was the only way in which it would have been possible to convey the truth at a time when intellectual darkness prevailed. Seldom, however, has the sacred light of the Fool been more deftly utilized than by Erasmus. In



this witty satire, his tongue could speak freely, so that *In Praise of Folly* was the most daring and at the same time most artistic work of Erasmus's generation. Earnestness and merriment, profound knowledge and the most impish nonsense, truth and exaggeration, make up the brightly-hued mosaic; if the reader should think to catch one mood and examine it, he will find it has slipped from his grasp with a quirk and a prank. If one recalls the style in which most authors of that day expressed themselves, if one remembers the coarse invective with which controversy was carried on, one can well understand why such a brilliant firework, thrown into the midst of the intellectual gloom that reigned, could delight and emancipate the mind for a hundred years after it was concocted.

The satire begins with a jest. Dame Stultitia, in her academic gown but wearing the fool's cap on her head (it is thus that Holbein depicted her), mounts the rostrum and holds forth in praise of herself. She alone, we learn, with her hand-maidens Flattery and Self-Love keeps the world a-going. Without my aid, no league, no community life, can be a lasting acquirement; were it not for me the folk would not remain loyal to its ruling prince, the servant would rise against his master and the lady's maid against her mistress; the pupil would rebel against his teacher, the friend forsake his friend, the wife desert her husband, the host cheat his guest, one comrade would play his fellow-comrade false; indeed, no man would be able to tolerate another if they did not mutually deceive one another, now by flattery and now by a crafty surrender; in a word, mankind would find life intolerable were it not accompanied by a deep-rooted folly. The merchant goes about his business because of an exaggerated value set upon money; the poet, inspired by the hope of achieving celebrity, creates his work lured by the craving for a spurious immortality; the warrior is

courageous because of his illusions of greatness. A sober and right-minded man would take to his heels at the outset of the fray, he would economize his energies and just give out enough to earn a livelihood; were it not for the foolish weed of a wish for immortality implanted in him, he would never raise a hand or exercise his mind. Now a flood of paradox is poured forth in sprightly vein. She, Stultitia, puts blinkers on us all, and she alone is capable of making mankind content; everybody will be the happier for blindly clinging to his passion and living as irrationally as possible. For reflection and worry make a desert of the soul; pleasure is never the outcome of clarity and wisdom, but invariably finds expression in intoxication, excess, frenzy, madness; a pinch of folly is needed to put savour into every genuine form of living, and the righteous man, the man of perspicacity, the man who is not the slave of his passions, is by no means to be considered a normal individual but an abnormality. "He only who has experienced folly in his own life, is worthy the name of Man." Stultitia, therefore, sings her own praises, since she is the driving-force behind all human activity; with the eloquence of the Goddess of Persuasion she proclaims that the belauded virtues of this world, clarity of thought and correctness of vision, straightforwardness and honesty, have been invented merely to embitter the lives of men; and, since she is a learned dame, she quotes, for her better honour and glory, Sophocles's dictum: "Only in unreason is life a pleasant experience."

In proper academic style, Dame Stultitia develops her thesis point by point, and brings a crowd of witnesses to emphasize her arguments. Every estate, during the grand parade, is induced to display its own special delusion. She holds them all in review, the babbling rhetoricians, the hair-splitting lawyers, the philosophers each of whom imagines he can place the universe in his



own particular sack, the proud of birth, the money-grubbers, the schoolmen and writers, the gamesters and war-mongers, and, finally, those who are everlastingly slaves of their feelings, the lovers, who invariably imagine the object of their love to be the summit of all beauty and delight. A magnificent gallery of human folly is thus presented to us with Erasmus's inimitable knowledge of human nature, and such great writers of comedy as Molière and Ben Jonson merely needed to lift their materials from this amazing puppet-show in order, from its delicate and elusive caricatures, to mould the forms of real men and women. No genus of human folly escapes detection, none is forgotten; the completeness of the picture acts as a safeguard for Erasmus—for who would venture to declare that he was singled out for condemnation when no one else was treated with less contempt than himself? For the first time, Erasmus was able to show the universality of his culture, his intellectual force, his wit, his knowledge, his clear-sightedness, and his humour. His scepticism and the soaring superiority of his vision of the world burst into a hundred sparks and hues like a splendid rocket. A lofty brain finds fulfilment under sportive guise.

At bottom, however, this book was more than a joke to Erasmus, and he was able in the apparently small work to manifest his spirit more aptly than in any other because the *Laus stultitiæ* was a kind of examination of conscience applied to Erasmus himself. He deceived himself neither as to persons nor things, knowing what underlay the seemingly most inexplicable of weaknesses, realizing to the full what it was that hindered him in his undertakings and prevented him from producing any genuinely creative work. He recognized that he was too rational and lacked passionate impulse, that his non-partisanship and his way of passing things by with averted eyes placed him outside the pale of the living.



Reason is nothing but a regulative mechanism, it can never create out of its own energies; the really productive genius needs to have its illusions in order to give birth to that which is within it. Strangely lacking in this power of creating illusions for himself, Erasmus remained all his life a passionless man, cool-headed and fair-minded, never experiencing that greatest of joys, complete surrender, the lavishing of one's own self in holy ecstasy. In his *Moriæ* for the first and last time Erasmus shows that he knew and secretly fought against his inborn rationality, impartiality, sense of duty, moderation. And, since the artist works with a surer touch when he is dealing with something that he longs to possess and cannot, so in this instance, the over-rationalized author proved the best interpreter when it came to intoning a merry hymn in honour of folly and in the cleverest way to turn his nose up at the deification of pure wisdom.

Even so we must not allow ourselves to be deceived as to the motive lying behind the mask of comedy which the book presents to our outward gaze. This seemingly farcical *In Praise of Folly* was, beneath its carnival mask, one of the most dangerous books of its day, and that which appears to us as a witty firework is in reality a bomb whose explosion opened the road to the German Reformation. *Laus stultitiæ* was one of the most effective pamphlets that ever was written. Alienated and embittered, the German pilgrims returned from Rome where they had seen popes and cardinals leading the same thriftless and immoral lives as the temporal princes of the Renaissance. Disenchanted and impatient, these genuinely religious men demanded a "reform of the Church from the head downwards and through all its limbs." But the pompous and showy popes paid no need to entreaties, and the supplicants who spoke too loud or were too passionate in protestation were led gagged to the scaffold, there to atone for their effrontery. In

racy folk-songs and in sturdy anecdotes the bitterness felt at the misuse of relics as objects of commercial haggling, and at the sale of indulgences, found vent; clandestine leaflets bearing the image of the pope circulated freely among the population, and on some of these he was depicted as a huge blood-sucking spider. Erasmus publicly nailed the catalogue of curial crimes upon the wall of his epoch. Master of ambiguity as he was, he made use of his gift in magisterial manner, allowing his Stultitia to utter the dangerous and yet necessary strictures, and thus letting loose a determined assault upon the religious abuses of the day. Although such criticism was presented in farcical fashion, he who wields a verbal flail knows well enough what lies behind the words. "If the highest dignitaries, if the popes, those representatives of Christ on earth, were really to model their lives upon His, were to copy His poverty, were to bear His burdens, were to carry His cross, were to share His scorn for mundane things, who could be more worthy of compassion than they? How many treasures would the Holy Fathers have to forfeit if wisdom were suddenly to subdue their minds! Instead of untold riches, divine honours, the distribution of so many dignities and offices and dispensations, the pocketing of so many taxes and contributions, these people who had led such easy and enjoyable existences would have to spend their sleepless nights in prayer, would have to observe the fasts, would be expected to weep and to meditate and to pass their days in a thousand hardships." Then, suddenly, Dame Stultitia shakes off her fool's trappings, and unambiguously demands an early reformation. "Since the whole of Christ's teaching rests upon meekness, patience, and contempt of the world, the meaning is obvious. Christ verily required that His representative should equip himself in the way He desired, and expected him, not merely to lay his shoes and his purse aside, but likewise his

raiment, so that he should enter upon his apostolic duties stripped naked. He should take nothing with him but a sword, not the unholy weapon which serves the purposes of robbery and murder, but the sword of the spirit which pierces to the remotest recesses of the soul and at one blow destroys all passion, so that piety alone shall take up residence therein."

Imperceptibly, the joke has turned into trenchant earnest. From beneath the fool's cap gleam the unerring and severe eyes of the greatest critic of his epoch. Foolishness spoke aloud what hundreds of thousands were secretly thinking. With greater strength, with more insistence, and with deeper knowledge and understanding, than in any other writing of that time, is the urgent need for a thorough reform within the Church brought home to the consciousness of Erasmus's contemporaries. Something always has to be destroyed if the new is to come into being. Before every spiritual revolution, the pioneer must lead the way—the critic, the enlightener, the creator, and the builder. The soil has to be ploughed before it will be ready to receive the seed.

Negation for negation's sake and unfruitful criticism were not in keeping with Erasmus's mental texture. When he showed up abuses, it was solely to demand that they be replaced by what seemed to him more justified and right; he never blamed in a spirit of arrogant and carping censure. Nothing was more alien to this man of tolerant character than a crass, iconoclastic assault upon the Catholic Church. As a humanist, Erasmus did not dream of a rebellion against the ecclesiastical arm, but of a "reflorescentia," a renascence of religion, of a renewal of the Christian ideal by a return to its Nazarene purity. Just as the Renaissance brought fresh



vigour into the arts and sciences by a study of the works of classical antiquity, so did Erasmus hope that the Church, bogged as it was in externals, might be transfigured by ridding it of contaminated sources and going back to the teachings of the Gospels, by hearkening to the very words of Christ, and "finding anew the real Christ buried beneath the superimposed dogmas." Here, again, we see Erasmus acting as pioneer, as leader in the vanguard of the Reformation.

According to Erasmus, humanism can never be revolutionary, and though he urged reform within the Church and himself was the most important of those who prepared the way, he could not, since he was of an extremely pacific disposition, work for an open schism. Erasmus never laid down the law, never violently resented contradiction after the manner of a Luther, a Zwingli, or a Calvin; he never dogmatized as to what was right in the Church or what was wrong, which sacraments were acceptable and which were unacceptable, whether the Elements were substantial or insubstantial. He was content to insist that the true essence of Christian piety was not to be found in outward observance, but that the measure of a man's faith lay within him. It was not the worship of saints, or pilgrimages, or psalm-singing, or theological scholasticism with its sterile "Judaism," which made the Christian; but his spiritual trustworthiness, his human and Christianly way of living. "He alone does honour to the saints who imitates their virtues." It is not by collecting their dry bones, not by going on pilgrimages to their tombs and burning many candles to their memory that a man proves his Christianity. Far more important than minute attention to ritual and prayer, to fasts and attendance at Mass, is that a Christian should order his life in the spirit of Jesus. "The quintessence of our religion is peace and unanimity." Here, as always, Erasmus's object is to raise the

living up to the all-human rather than to petrify it in formulas. He wants to loosen Christianity from that which is purely ecclesiastical in so far as he can bring it into unison with the universally human. Everything which the peoples and religions have invested with ethical values, he desired to see adopted into Christianity as an element of fruitfulness; and though living in an epoch of narrow-minded and dogmatic fanaticism, this great humanist was able to deliver the splendid dictum: "Wherever you encounter truth, look upon it as Christianity." Therewith a bridge was built, linking up all times and all zones. He who, like Erasmus, sees wisdom and humaneness and morality everywhere, as forms of the higher humanity, and as belonging to Christianity, cannot be like the philosophers of old banished into hell by monkish zealots ("holy Socrates," cried Erasmus once in a fit of enthusiasm); on the contrary, all that was noble and sublime in antiquity, shall be roped into the religious fold, "as when the Jews in their flight from Egypt took with them their gold and their silver utensils to adorn the temple they would build." Nothing that has ever been of great moral meaning or of ethical significance to mankind should be, according to Erasmus's concept of religion, excluded from Christian doctrine, for among men there are neither specifically Christian nor specifically pagan truths; in all its forms, truth is divine. Erasmus, therefore, never spoke of a Christian theology, a tenet of faith, but of a "*philosophia Christi*," that is to say, a theory of right behaviour. Christianity was, for him, only another word for a lofty and humane morality.

In view of the architectonic strength of the Catholic exegesis and the ardent love displayed by the mystics, these fundamental ideas of Erasmus may appear rather jejune and commonplace, but they are human. In this matter, as in the other fields of knowledge he approached,



Erasmus may be said to have opened up vistas rather than to have plumbed depths. His *Enchiridion militis christiani* (a Handbook for the Christian Fighter), a work written at the request of a pious lady for the edification of her husband, became the theological text-book of the common people; and the Reformation, with its challenging and revolutionary demands, found in the book a field ready prepared for the sowing. But the mission of this solitary crier in the wilderness was not to open the battle; his vocation was to calm down at the eleventh hour the menacing conflict by proposing certain compromises and accommodations; for at that time in the Councils of the Church there were many disputes and much contention over insignificant details in the interpretation of dogma, and Erasmus dreamed of an ultimate synthesis of all forms of spiritual belief, of a "rinascimento" of Christianity, so that the world might for ever be freed from strife and counterstrife, and thereby that a belief in God might truly be made the religion of mankind.

The fact that Erasmus was able to express the same thought in many different forms shows how versatile he was. *In Praise of Folly* reveals abuses within the Catholic Church; this *Handbook for the Christian Fighter* presents us with the dream of a universally understandable ideal, a religion that would be more spiritual and more humane; simultaneously, by making fresh translations of the Gospels from Greek into Latin, he worked at the practical realization of his contention that Christianity must be freed from contaminated sources—thus paving the way for Luther's rendering of the Bible into the German vernacular.

Let us go back to the wellspring of true belief, let us seek truth there where she is still divinely pure and not sullied by dogma—these constituted Erasmus's demands upon the new humanistic theology; and with instinctive realization of the needs of the day, he pointed to this



work as that of the most decisive importance, fifteen years before Luther entered the arena. In 1504 he wrote: "I cannot find words to express the delight I feel when voyaging full sail across the Holy Scriptures, and how everything which keeps me away from them or merely interrupts my study of them annoys and disgusts me." The life of Christ, as recounted in the Gospels, must no longer be the privileged reading of monks and priests who happen to know Latin; the entire people must have part and lot in it, "the peasant shall read it while resting by the plough, and the spinner at his loom"; women must impart this core of Christianity to their children. But before Erasmus dared to carry out his idea of advocating that the Bible should be translated into the folk-speech, our man of learning realized that the Vulgate (the only translation that was tolerated by and approved of by the Church) was full of lamentable errors and obscure passages, and that from the philological point of view it was open to grave criticism. No earthly stain could be allowed to besmirch truth; so, firm in his conviction, he set himself to the formidable task of making a fresh Latin translation of the New Testament, with a critical commentary of his own in elucidation of the Vulgate's discrepancies and misinterpretations. This new Latin version was published by Frobenius at Basle in 1516. Its issue signified that a notable step forward had been made, for even in the theological faculty—the last to be touched by such an occurrence—the spirit of free investigation thus successfully penetrated. But it was typical of Erasmus that even where he promoted a revolutionary change, he was so careful to maintain the outward forms of decorum that the staunchest blow never led to a collision. In order, at the very outset, to blunt the point of any theological attack, Erasmus dedicated this first free translation of Holy Writ to the ruler of the Church, to Pope

Leo X, himself in sympathy with the humanist movement, who assured the author in a friendly brief: "We are greatly pleased." He even went on to praise the zeal with which the labour had been undertaken. As an individual, thanks to his conciliatory temperament, Erasmus always knew how to solve the conflict between ecclesiastical study and free investigation. Among his contemporaries, this was far from being the case, and, consequently, the most furious enmities ensued. His genius as mediator, his art of bringing about a gentle agreement, triumphed likewise in this thorniest of spheres.

With these three books Erasmus conquered his epoch. He had spoken the enlightening word which solved the problems of his generation; and the calm, compassionate, humane way in which he coped with the most burning questions of the day, brought him sympathy from all sides. Mankind is ever grateful to him who maintains it to be possible for progress to be made in a rational manner; and the new century looked with pleasure to the one man in Europe who was able to appreciate mental and spiritual things from the human point of view. Too long had ears been tired by the excited babble of monks, the quarrels of fanatics, by offensive gibes and lack of understanding on the part of the schoolmen. In Erasmus was to be found a heart that held the world in friendly affection; one who, in spite of grievous defects, believed in this world and wished to lead it into the realm of clarity. What invariably happens in such circumstances happened in Erasmus's case. When a man is determined to deal with the most ticklish problems of his day, there assemble around him those who share his views, and this body of faithful admirers increases the master's creative energies by the power of their serene expectation. All the forces, all the hopes, all

the impatience of the period were concentrated in this man who was expected to raise mankind to a higher ethical standard by means of the newly discovered sciences. "He or none," was on every lip. "He or none can snap the intolerable tension which we all of us feel in the air." Merely as a literary man, Erasmus's name became an incomparable power at the opening of the sixteenth century. He might, had he possessed a daring spirit, have utilized his position to perform some outstanding deed, some authoritative reforming act, that would have been of historical importance. But the world of action was not his world. Erasmus could clarify but not shape, he could prepare the ground but not garner the harvest. His name does not adorn the annals of the Reformation; another was to reap where he had sown.



## Chapter 6

### GREATNESS AND LIMITATIONS OF HUMANISM

BETWEEN the ages of forty to fifty, Erasmus attained to the zenith of his fame. For a hundred years or more, Europe had known none greater. At the time when he flourished, not one of his contemporaries, neither Dürer nor Raphael, Leonardo, Paracelsus, nor Michelangelo, enjoyed anything like the veneration which Erasmus received in the realm of the spirit; no other author of the day saw his works issued in such numerous editions; no moral or artistic respect granted elsewhere could be compared with that which accrued around him. To pronounce the name of Erasmus was, in the early decades of the sixteenth century, to call up the perfect image of the wise man, the *optimum et maximum*, the best that brain could conceive of and the most sublime—as Melanchthon writes in his Latin panegyric—the unsurpassed authority in matters concerning the scientific, the poetical, the mundane, and the spiritual achievements of his epoch. He was called “doctor universalis,” and “prince of scientific learning,” “father of study,” “the protector of an honourable theology,” the “light of the world,” the “Pythia of the west,” “*vir incomparabilis et doctorum phœnix*.” No praise seemed too high to bestow on him. “Erasmus,” wrote Mutian, “is suprahuman. He is divine, and should be venerated piously as though he were a creature come down to us from heaven.” Camererius, another humanist, declares: “Every one who does not wish to remain a stranger in

the realm of the Muses, admires him, glorifies him, sings his praises. He who is capable of extracting a letter from Erasmus has already achieved fame and can celebrate a veritable triumph. But he who is allowed converse with Erasmus may count himself among the blessed that walk this earth."

In actual fact, there was intense competition, among all who wished to cut a figure, for Erasmus's favours, though he had so short a while before been an unknown scholar, who eked out a subsistence by incessant toil, writing dedications, giving lessons, and dispatching begging letters, who had to cringe to and flatter wealthy patrons in order to procure the wherewithal to live. Now the mighty wooed him—and it is invariably a glorious sight to witness earthly power and riches bending the knee before the predominance of the spiritual. Emperors and kings, princes and dukes, ministers and professors, popes and prelates, were all of them rivals for Erasmus's good will. Charles V, ruler of the New World and the Old, offered him a place in the Council of the Empire; Henry VIII wanted him to reside in England; Ferdinand offered him a pension if only he would consent to go to Vienna; Francis I promised him a fine reception in Paris; the most tempting invitations came from Holland, Brabant, Hungary, Poland, and Portugal; five universities strove to obtain the honour of placing him on the staff; three popes wrote him letters full of veneration. His room was cluttered with tokens of esteem, free tributes from wealthy admirers. There were golden goblets and silver table-services; casks of finest wines were sent to him; rare and precious books. Everything seemed to have set itself in motion to tempt him to make the most of his celebrity. Erasmus, shrewd and sceptical as he was, accepted these gifts and honours with courtesy. He allowed others to bestow presents upon him; he did not demur when his name was praised and commended;



on the contrary, he enjoyed this good fortune with a feeling of ease and comfort. But he was not to be bought. He accepted service, but he gave none in return; always he remained the incorruptible fighter for that inner freedom and unbribable integrity of the artist which he regarded as the necessary prerequisites for gaining an influence in the realm of morals. He realized that his strength lay in his independence; and, though it may seem a superfluous piece of foolishness on his part, he wanted his fame to precede him from court to court, instead of being fixed like a shining star above his own house. He no longer needed to travel in another's wake, for everyone journeyed to find him; Basle, because he dwelt there, became a residential city for the learned, the rallying point for the whole intellectual world. No prince, no scholar, indeed no one who desired consideration, ever missed visiting the sage of Basle if chance took them near that town on their journeyings, for to have held converse with Erasmus came to be looked upon as a kind of cultural dubbing with knighthood, and a call at his house (as in the eighteenth century at Voltaire's and in the nineteenth at Goethe's) became one of the most obvious tokens of respect that could be paid to the symbolical carrier of the unseen power of the spirit. In order to possess a holograph signature of his name, nobles and men of learning would journey for days; a cardinal, nephew of the reigning pope, who had vainly asked Erasmus to his board, did not feel offended when the invitation was refused, nor did he consider it beneath his dignity to look Erasmus up in the fusty little room at Frobenius's printing works. Every letter from Erasmus was folded in brocade by the recipient, to be displayed as a precious relic before the admiring gaze of friends; and a recommendation from the master acted like an open sesame at all doors. Never did a man (not even Voltaire nor Goethe) enjoy so great a prestige in



Europe, a prestige due entirely to his intellectual acquirements.

Looking back through the centuries, it is hard to understand why Erasmus should have held such sway over his time and generation, for neither his works nor his activities seem to warrant anything of the sort. He appears to us a sensible, humane, versatile, and multi-form personality, an attractive and stimulating man; but in no wise one to sweep his fellows along in a mighty current and transform the aspect of the world. Yet in his own epoch, Erasmus was more than a literary phenomenon; he was the symbolical expression of its secret spiritual longings. Eras about to be renovated project their ideal into a figure which shall manifest the soul of the age; for the *zeitgeist*, if it is to grasp its own essence concretely, invariably chooses the type of man most suited to its purpose; and when this unique and chance-found individual outsoars his inborn capacities, it grows, in a sense, enthusiastic over its own enthusiasm. New feelings and new thoughts are understood only by a limited circle of the élite; the broad masses of the people are incapable of grasping them in their abstract form; they must have them rendered tangible to the senses and anthropomorphized. In the place of an idea, a man or an image or prototype is set up; and the faithful endeavour to model themselves upon this substitute presentment. The desires of the time found in Erasmus, for one brief historical hour, their fullest expression. The *uomo universale*, the non-partisan, the rich in knowledge and learning, with his eyes looking freely into the future, became the ideal type of the rising generation. In venerating humanism, people paid homage to their own courage in the realm of thought and to their freshly formed aspirations. For the first time, intellectual authority was given precedence over inherited or transmitted authority; and that the change was brought about rapidly is shown by

the fact that the wielders of authority submitted voluntarily to the new order of things. Symbolical of the day was it that Charles V, to the horror of his court, should stoop to pick up a paint-brush Titian's son had let fall; that the pope, rudely requested by Michelangelo to leave the Sistine chapel, meekly did so in order not to disturb the master; that princes and bishops began to collect books and pictures and manuscripts rather than weapons. Unconsciously they capitulated, recognizing that the power of creative thought had taken the reins of government, and that works of art were destined to outlive the works of war and of politics. Europe realized at last that her vocation and the whole meaning of her existence lay in the dominance of the mind and in the creation of a united civilization which should rally beneath its standard all the peoples of the West. Thus she would start a movement which would lead to the inauguration of a world-wide culture.

The spirit of the age, therefore, chose Erasmus as banner-bearer for the new way of thinking; and as "anti-barbarus," as the fighter against all forms of backwardness and traditionalism, as harbinger of a higher, freer, more humane community of mankind, as the guide into the coming citizenship of the world, he took his place at the head of the marching column. We in our epoch feel that other figures were, perhaps, worthier of this position, such men as Leonardo and Paracelsus, for instance, who were more daring explorers, more sturdy fighters, more resembling the Faustian spirit, that personification of humanity, tempted and disquieted, but at length groping its way to the light. These were and are profounder types of *uomo universale*, on a far more splendid scale than Erasmus could ever be. But the sixteenth century saw this not, and it was thanks to his clear (sometimes too piercing) understanding, his contentment at knowing the knowledgeable, his urbanity, that

he owed his good fortune. And the instinct of the age acted rightly. The renewal which was fated to take place needed moderate reformers not rabid revolutionaries; in Erasmus, his contemporaries found the symbol to represent the incessant control exercised by reason. For a wonderful moment in time, Europe lay dreaming the humanist dream of a united civilization—united in speech, united in religion, united in culture—with the age-long and disastrous contentions laid to rest. This unforgettable endeavour is inseparably connected with Erasmus of Rotterdam's name. His ideas, his wishes, his dreams, for a short space governed Europe; and it was his and it is our misfortune that this pure longing for unity and peace among the peoples of the West only constituted an interlude in the bloody tragedy of our common fatherland.

Erasmus's imperium, which should have for the first time—O memorable hour!—encompassed all the lands and peoples and languages of Europe, was to have held gentle sway. It was to come into being, not by the use of force, but by the aspiring and convincing energy of intellectual achievement, for the humanists detested anything which smacked of the mailed fist. Having been elected leader by acclamation, Erasmus exercised no dictatorial rights. Voluntary adhesion and inner freedom are the fundamental laws of this invisible kingdom. It was not through the intolerance hitherto exhibited by princes and religious fanatics that men of Erasmus's way of thinking hoped to lead mankind to adopt the humanistic and humane ideals they adumbrated. No; it was by lighting up the darkness that the roving beasts were to be lured into the bright realm, by gently convincing the ignorant and those who stood aside so that in the end they should of their own accord enter the circle of illumination. There is nothing imperialistic in humanism; in its domain there are neither foes nor thralls. He



who refuses to belong to the select circle can remain outside if he prefers; no one compels him; he is not pressed forcibly to accept the new ideal. Every form of intolerance—and intolerance invariably implies misunderstanding—was alien to the doctrine of universal understanding. On the other hand, none were denied an entry into this spiritual guild. Anybody was eligible to become a humanist if he desired education and culture. Men of any class, and women too, nobles and priests, kings and merchants, the laity and the clergy, all had free access to this free community; none were asked whence they came and to what race or class they belonged, no inquiries were made to discover what was their native speech or the nation to which they owed fealty. Thus an unheard-of concept came to freshen European thought: the idea of supranationalism. Languages, which had hitherto formed an impenetrable wall between nation and nation, must no longer separate the peoples. A bridge would be built by means of a universal tongue, the Latin of the humanists. At the same time the concept of a fatherland for each nation would have to be proved untenable because it formed too narrow an ideal. It should be replaced by the European, the supranational ideal. "The entire world is one common fatherland," declared Erasmus in his *Querela pacis* (Complaint of Peace), and from this commanding position he looked down upon the senseless quarrels between the nations, the hatred between English, Germans, and French, to exclaim: "Why do such foolish names still exist to keep us sundered, since we are united in the name of Christ?" Disputes between Europeans seemed to the humanists to be the outcome of misunderstandings arising from too narrow-minded an outlook, too faulty an education; the duty of coming generations of Europeans would be to replace the vainglorious claims of petty princelings, of fanatical sectarians, and of national egoists, by sym-

pathetic co-operation, by emphasizing that which could lead to harmony, by raising the European spirit to preside over the national spirit, to change Christianity as a simple religious congregation into a universal and all-embracing Christliness, where love of mankind and a desire to serve meekly and devotedly should prevail. Erasmus, we see, aimed higher than merely achieving a cosmopolitan community. What he showed was a resolute will to create a new spiritual form of unity in the West. Before his day, there had been men to promote the notion of a united Europe: the Roman Cæsars, for example, with their idea of the *pax Romana*, Charlemagne, as, at a later date, Napoleon. But these autocrats worked with fire and sword, endeavouring to compel the nations to unite under the threat of violence; and the fist of the conqueror weighed heavily on the weaker in order to bind them the tighter to the strong. The great difference between their ideas and those of Erasmus was that to him European unity seemed to be a moral aim, utterly unselfish, a spiritual demand. With him began to be postulated the concept (which many are still advocating to-day) of a United States of Europe under the ægis of a common culture and a common civilization.

As a matter of course, the first thing Erasmus claimed, as champion of this and of his other projects for mutual understanding, was the disappearance of force and in especial the disappearance of war, "the reef upon which so many good things are shipwrecked." He was the first man of letters to advocate pacifist ideals. During an era of perpetual warfare, he penned no fewer than five works attacking war; in 1504, an appeal to Philip the Handsome, King of Castile; in 1514, another to the Bishop of Cambrai in which we read, "as a Christian prince you might for Christ's sake do your best to secure



peace"; in 1515, the renowned essay in the *Adagia* which bears the eternally true title, "*Dulce bellum inexpertis*" (only to those who have never experienced it does war seem beautiful); in 1516 he addressed young Charles V in strong terms in the course of his *Instructions for a Pious and Christianly Prince*; in 1517 appeared the *Querela pacis* which was issued in every language and circulated widely among the masses, this "complaint of Peace, who was rejected by all the nations and peoples of Europe, and driven forth and slain."

Even in those days, more than four hundred years before our own time, Erasmus knew how little a straightforward lover of peace could count upon gratitude and acquiescence. "It comes to this, that if one ventures to open his mouth against war he is looked upon as not much better than a brute beast, as a fool, and as being unchristianly." But that did not prevent him, with ceaselessly renewed resoluteness, in an epoch when club-law prevailed, and the rulers were guilty of the most barbarous acts of violence, from raising his voice in condemnation of the bellicose attitude of the princes. He considered Cicero was right when he said that an "unjust peace was preferable to the most just of wars." A whole arsenal of arguments, to which we to-day might go in search of numberless weapons wherewith to attack war, was used by Erasmus, the lone fighter, against this plague. "When animals fall upon one another," he writes, "I can understand and forgive, for they act in ignorance. But men should not need to be told that war is of necessity unjustifiable since, as a rule, it harms not so much those who prepare for it and who carry it on; for usually the full burden of it falls upon innocent parties, upon the unhappy masses, who gain nothing either from victory or from defeat. The chief hurt accrues to those who have had nothing to do with it; and even when the luck of the fight is on our side, this



good fortune for one spells misfortune for the other." The idea of war cannot, therefore, find any *modus vivendi* with the idea of justice. Besides, he asks again, how could any war ever be justifiable? For Erasmus, there existed no unique and absolute truth either in the theological realm or in the domain of philosophy. Truth is a thing of many facets; so, indeed, is justice. Therefore "a prince should in no matter be more cautious or slower to move than in deciding to make war. Nor should he be satisfied to be confident that right is on his side—for who is not prone to regard his own cause as just?" All that is right has two sides, all things are "tainted by bias, and coloured by the party spirit"; even when a man feels quite sure he is right, his right must not be defended by force and must never be achieved by force, for "war grows out of another war, and thus one war creates a second."

A man of intellect could never look upon a decision arrived at by a call to arms as the moral solution of a conflict. Erasmus expressly declares that in case of war breaking out the men of intelligence and learning in every land must not renounce their friendship towards one another. Their attitude must never be to strengthen the contrasts in outlook among the nations, the races, and the classes by means of a disintegrating partisanship; they must unflinchingly remain in the sphere of human kindliness and justice. Their eternal duty is to fight against the "vicious, unchristian, and wild irrationality of war" by setting up the ideal of universal brotherhood and universal Christianity. His greatest reproach against the Church as the setter of moral standards is that she sacrificed the magnificent Augustinian idea of "universal peace in Christ" to aspirations for the conquest of worldly power. "Theologians and teachers of Christian living are not ashamed to remain causes of discord, incendiaries, and leaders of those movements which our Lord

Jesus Christ hated most. . . . How is it that the bishop's crozier and the warrior's sword find themselves in one another's company, the mitre wedded to the helmet, the Gospels to the buckler? How can they deliver Christ's word and preach war from the same pulpit, and acclaim God and the devil in the same trumpet-blast?" The "ecclesiastical warrior" is a contradiction to God's holy word, for the term denies the sublimest message left by the Lord and Master when He said: "Peace be with you."

Erasmus becomes passionate whenever he raises his voice against war, hatred, narrow-mindedness; but this passion of indignation never troubles the clarity of his outlook upon the world. Idealist at heart, and sceptical through his rational way of thinking, Erasmus knew all the oppositions which would arise in the practical inauguration of that "universal peace in Christ," that autocracy of the humanistic reason. The man who, in his *Praise of Folly*, described every species of human illusion and human silliness, and the impossibility of teaching mankind to act better, did not belong to those idealistic dreamers who imagine that they can slay or even stun by the written word, by books, by sermons, and by tracts, the ever-present impulse towards violence which lies at the basis of human nature. He did not turn a blind eye to the fact that this lust for power and this joy in battle had fomented in the veins of man since the days when he was still a cannibal, for hundreds and thousands of years; that they were dark survivals of the primal hate of one human animal for his fellow; and that hundreds, perhaps thousands of years would be needed to educate him into a higher ethical standard, to raise him culturally, so that in the end he may leave the husks of his animal origins behind and become a member of a genuinely human race of men. Erasmus knew that elemental impulses were not to be conjured out of exist-



ence by gentle and elevating words ; and he accepted the barbarism of the world as an incontrovertible fact, and as something that was inexpugible. His own combats took place in other spheres ; as a man of intellect, he had to turn to men of his own kidney, not to the led and the misled, but to the leaders, the princes, priests, scholars, artists, to those whom he knew to be responsible for the unrest throughout Europe. His wide vision had long since informed him that the impulse to violence is not in itself a danger. Violence is scant of breath ; it strikes out blindly and in a frenzy of rage ; its will, however, is aimless ; it takes short views, and after such mad attacks it sinks back upon itself powerless and limp. Even when violence proves contagious and morbidly infects whole groups, these loose gangs are speedily broken up, and they disperse as soon as the first wave of ardour is spent. Insurrections and rebellions have never been a genuine menace if they have lacked intellectual leadership. Only when the impulse to violence is inspired with an idea, or is made to serve an idea, do genuine *tumulti* occur. Then come the bloody and destructive revolutions, then the bands of ragamuffins get formed into a party hastening to obey the rallying-cry, then by organization is an army created, then does a dogma help to promote a movement. All the great and vehement conflicts that have arisen among men are more rightly described as the outcome of certain ideologies than as being due to the violence and bloodthirstiness of the human animal ; for an idea may let loose the will to violence and drive it to the attack. Fanaticism, the bastard begotten out of brain and power, fancies itself dictator in the realm of thought, so that only what it thinks is acceptable and must be forced upon the whole universe ; it thus splits the human community into friends or foes, adherents or opponents, heroes or criminals, believers or heretics ; since it recognizes no other system than its own and no other truth than its own, it



needs must resort to violence in order to curb and bridle the divine multiplicity of phenomena and to bring everything under one yoke. The forcible curtailment of mental latitude, of freedom of opinions, every kind of inquisition and censorship, of scaffold and stake—these evils were not brought into the world by blind violence, but by rigidly staring fanaticism, that genius of one-sidedness, that hereditary enemy of universality, that captive of a single idea which would shut the whole world up in a cage.

Therefore Erasmus the humanist, who his life long was for ever pointing to what was universal in mankind as being its loftiest and holiest possession, considered that the intellectual could shoulder no heavier burden of responsibility than when, by a one-sided ideology, he furnished the ever-ready will of the masses with a pretext for deeds of violence, since thus he let loose primitive forces which far outran his intentions, and falsified his purposes however pure they might be. One man single-handed is capable of setting the hounds of passion into motion, but he is hardly ever capable of bringing them to heel again. He who breathes his word softly into sleeping fires must remember that he may fan these fires into destructive flames; he who arouses fanaticism by declaring that only one system of existence, of thought, and of belief is valid, must recognize that he may be promoting a fissure in the heart of humanity, and may bring about a spiritual or actual war against every other form of thought and being. Tyranny over thought amounts to a declaration of war against the mental freedom of mankind; and he who, like Erasmus, seeks a higher synthesis for all ideas, seeks a harmony that shall embrace the whole of humanity, must look upon every form of biased thinking, of unwillingness to understand, as an attack upon his own hope of bringing about a mutual agreement. The humanistically educated, the

humanely minded man in the Erasmian sense, can never pledge himself unreservedly to any kind of ideology, for every idea strives in its own fashion to achieve hegemony; nor may he bind himself to any party, since every member of a party must of necessity be a partisan, and see himself and feel himself and think of himself as adhering to that party. A man must at all costs guard his freedom of thought and of action, for in the absence of this freedom no justice is possible—and yet justice is the one idea which all mankind should share in common. To think in the Erasmian way is to think independently; to act in the Erasmian way is to work for mutual understanding. The Erasmian creed, which is equivalent to a belief in mankind, demands that the faithful shall never promote dissension, but unity; never encourage the partisanship of the biased, but, rather, shall broaden the bases of mutual understanding and shall initiate further understandings; the more fanatical the epoch, the more above party should the true humanist be, gazing upon human errors and perplexities with indulgence and compassion, acting as the incorruptible champion of intellectual freedom and of justice here below. Erasmus, therefore, considered that every idea had a right to existence, and none could make an exclusive claim to being correct; and he who had tried to understand even folly and to sing its praises, could not feel antagonistic to any theory or thesis unless it endeavoured to do violence to others. A humanist, knowing so much, loves the world precisely because of its variegated manifestations, and its contrasts do not alarm him. Nothing is farther from his mind than to endeavour to abolish these contrasts after the manner of the fanatic and the system-monger who would like to see all values reduced to a common integer and every flower constrained to take one shape and one colour. This is the sign-manual of the humanist: never to look upon contrasts with an inimical eye;



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always to work with a view to bringing about unity even where unity seems impossible to achieve; invariably to seek out what is human in everything. Since Erasmus endeavoured to conciliate within himself such apparently irreconcilable elements as Christianity and classical antiquity, free thought and theology, Renaissance and Reformation, he must have deemed it possible that at some future date mankind would be able to bring into a joyful harmony the kaleidoscopic variety of the human universe, and to transform its contradictions into a higher unity. This ultimate and universal understanding—spiritual understanding among all the peoples of Europe—is, as a matter of fact, the only sort of religious creed which the level-headed and rationalistic humanists were trying to establish; and they worked for this end as ardently as their contemporaries did for a belief in God, proclaiming their message of a belief in man, declaring that upon this idea the meaning, the goal, and the future of the world depended. Instead of one-sidedness there must be unanimity, and thereby an ever humaner world of men.

The humanists recognized one single road whereby to achieve this training towards humanism: Education. Erasmus and those who shared his views, maintained that man would become more human by means of education through the printed book, for only the uneducated, only the unlettered yielded irreflectively to his passions. An educated man, a civilized man—and herein we see the tragical failure in their reasoning—was no longer capable of resorting to gory violence, and when once the educated, cultivated, and civilized got the upper hand, chaos and brute force would inevitably disappear, and war and persecution of opinions would become anachronisms. In their over-valuation of the effects of civilization, the



humanists failed to take account of the basic impulses and their untameable strength; in their facile optimism, they overlooked the terrible and wellnigh insoluble problem of mass-hatred and the vast and passionate psychoses of mankind. Their view was too simple. For them there existed two layers, an upper and a lower: in the latter were to be found the uncivilized, rough, and passion-ridden masses; in the former lived the educated, the penetrating, the humanistic, the civilized. They fancied that the main business was accomplished when increasingly large portions of the lower layer were transferred satisfactorily to the upper. Just as in Europe an ever-increasing area of land was reclaimed and brought under the plough, whereas previously these lands had been the haunts of savage beasts, so also must it be with mankind. Gradually ignorance and roughness among the peoples of Europe would be extirpated, to be substituted by cleared and fruitful zones of humanity. Thus religious thought would be replaced by the ideal of an uninterrupted ascent of man. The concept of a progressive evolution (at a later date to be converted into a scientific method by Darwin) became under the ægis of the humanists an ethical ideal towards which the men of eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe strove. Even in our modern scheme, Erasmian ideas play an important part. Nevertheless it would be erroneous to believe that humanistic culture and Erasmus's teaching were in any way democratic, and heralds of liberalism. Never for a moment did it enter Erasmus's head, never did it occur to his followers, that even the most insignificant rights should be granted to the folk, to the uneducated, to those who were still under age—for them, all the uneducated were "under age"; and although in the abstract they loved the whole of mankind, they were careful to eschew the company of the *vulgus profanum*. If we examine their theories more closely, we

shall see how the ancient arrogance of the nobly born has been replaced by another kind of arrogance, by the pride of intellect which was to hold sway for three hundred years to come, and which maintained that only the man who was sure of his Latinity, who had passed through a university, had a right to judge what was right and what was wrong, what was moral and what was immoral. The humanists, in the name of reason, were as determined to govern the world as were the princes in the name of authority and the Church in the name of Christ. They aimed at establishing an oligarchy, at inaugurating the dominion of an educated aristocracy; the best, the most cultured, οἱ ἄριστοι, were, in the Greek sense of the term, to take over the leadership of the "polis," the State. Thanks to their erudition, their clear and humanistic outlook, they felt that they had been singled out to act as mediators and leaders, to come to the rescue when the nations were waging war or quarrelling; nevertheless the improvement they looked for was not to be brought about with the aid of the people at large, but over the heads of the masses. At bottom, humanism was, therefore, far from being a denial of the knightly order; it was a renewal of this order along intellectualist lines. The humanists hoped to conquer the world by means of the pen just as those others had conquered with the sword; and, like those others, all unconsciously, they created a social convention adapted to their needs, a convention which should set them apart from "barbarians," a convention with a kind of courtly ceremonial of its own. They raised themselves to a novel kind of nobility by translating their names into Latin or Greek equivalents so as to dissemble the fact of their plebeian origins: Schwarzerd became Melanchthon, Geisshüssler became Myconius, Oelschläger became Olearius, Kochhase became Chytraeus, Dobnick became Cochläus, and so forth. They were careful to array

themselves in black clothing with ample folds, to differentiate themselves even outwardly from their fellow-citizens. It was considered to be beneath their dignity to write a book or a letter in the mother tongue, just as a knight would have been scandalized had he been asked to march forth to battle on foot amid the troops instead of mounted on horseback. Each felt it incumbent upon him to deport himself with special seemliness when mixing with the herd of those who had not entered the sacred precincts; they avoided hasty speech, cultivated decorous and courtly ways, while their contemporaries were rude and boisterous in behaviour. In writing and in style, in speech and in conduct, these aristocrats of the intellect aimed at dignity of expression and of thought, so that in the humanists the last faint rays of the epoch of chivalry fluttered up anew, after having been dimmed and laid to rest along with Emperor Maximilian's bones. This was an order of the mind whose insignium was the book in place of the Cross. And, since the order of knighthood had had recourse to the uncouth violence of the cannon in order to maintain itself in power, this noble company of idealists would fight against the boorish impacts of the folk revolutionaries, Luther and Zwingli, with the no less effective weapon of beauty.

But such deliberate ignoring of the masses, such studied indifference towards the world of reality, rendered it impossible to give durability to the kingdom Erasmus hoped to establish, and sapped the vital energy from his ideas. The fundamental mistake of the humanists was that they wished to teach the people from the heights of their idealism, instead of going down among the masses and endeavouring to understand them and to learn from them. The academic idealists fancied that they were already in power, because their kingdom spread over all lands, because in every country, at every



court, in the universities, monasteries, churches, everywhere, they had those that served the cause, they had their envoys and legates, who proudly furthered the progress of *eruditio* and *eloquentia* in the regions where barbarism held sway. But, though their realm was extensive, its roots did not go deep; it only influenced the most superficial layers, having but feeble relations with reality. When enthusiastic messages reached Erasmus almost daily from Poland, Bohemia, Hungary, or Portugal; when emperors, kings, and popes sought the philosopher's favour, how could he fail at times, alone in the seclusion of his study, to give himself up to the sweet delusion that the reign of reason had truly begun? But behind this huge accumulation of Latin epistles, he surely could not have been unaware of the complete unresponsiveness of the masses? Surely he could not have failed to hear the growing rumble of discontent arising from the depths? The "people" simply did not exist so far as Erasmus was concerned; he considered the masses were unworthy the attention of a refined and educated man, and it would be beneath his dignity to woo the favours of "barbarians." Thus, humanism was for the happy few, not for the broad multitude; it was never anything better than a kingdom set amid the clouds, lighting up for one moment the whole world, beautiful to contemplate, a pure picture painted by a creative mind looking down serenely from its unattainable heights upon the tenebrous world below. Such an airy and artificial structure could make no stand against a genuine storm; it was doomed to perish unresistingly, and to fall into oblivion.

The tragical side of the humanistic movement, and, indeed, the cause of its decline, was that though the ideas which animated it were great, the men who were

its prophets proved inadequate. As always with arm-chair philosophies, there was a tincture of the ludicrous in these well-meaning efforts to better the world. Thoroughly earnest and honest, wearing their Latinized names as if they were intellectual masks, the protagonists suffered from a dash of pedantry and vanity, so that their loveliest theories were thinly coated with these two far from attractive qualities. Erasmus's pygmy followers are touching in their professorial and academic naivety, having much in common with the excellent persons we meet in philanthropic and universal improvement societies; theoretical idealists whose religion consists in a belief in the inevitability of human progress, jejune dreamers constructing moral universes while sitting at their desks and writing down thesis after thesis on the subject of everlasting peace—while in the world of reality one war follows upon the heels of another, and the very same popes, emperors, and kings who have enthusiastically acceded to these ideas of conciliation, are simultaneously agreeing and running counter to one another and setting the world aflame. Were a new Ciceronian manuscript discovered, the humanist clan went wild with excitement, fancying the whole world would re-echo with the joyful tidings; every sympathetic pamphlet, be it never so unpretentious, roused their most ardent and passionate approval. But that which moved the man in the street, that which stirred the masses to the depths, all those things were outside the pale; they did not even wish to know about them; and, since they continued shut up in their studies, the words they uttered lacked resonance, and could find no echo in the world of reality. It was owing to this disastrous seclusion, this absence of popularity, that the humanists were never able to produce harvest out of their fecund ideas. The immense optimism which inspired the whole of their work could not grow into a healthy and fruitful plant



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and develop adequately, because among these theoretical pedagogues of the idea of human progress there was not one who possessed the power of speaking to and being understood by the people. Thus a great and sacred thought was doomed to rot away for several hundred years because the man did not exist who could convey it to the masses.

And yet that historic hour, in which the sun of human trust shone with gentle effulgence down upon our European earth, was a beautiful moment in time; and if the delusion that the people were already at peace and united was premature, still we must respect it, and return grateful thanks that it ever existed. Men have always been needed who would be bold enough to believe that history is not a dull and monotonous repetition, the same game played over and over again under different disguises, but have had an invincible confidence that moral progress is a reality, that mankind is slowly climbing an invisible ladder to better things, leaving behind its bestiality and attaining to godliness, abandoning the use of brute force in favour of the rule of a well-ordered mind, and that the highest, the final rung where full understanding will be achieved is no longer so very far aloft. The Renaissance and the humanistic movement combined to create a moment of intense optimism throughout the western world. We cannot do otherwise than love this epoch and admire its wonderful illusion, since then, for the first time, mutual confidence arose among the peoples of Europe, inspiring them with the idea that a higher, more knowledgeable, and wiser humanity would be created, outstripping in accomplishment even the civilizations of Greece and Rome.

And at the outset it seemed as if these optimists were right, for were not wonders and portents rife in those days, marvels superseding all that had hitherto gone to the making of the human story? Would it not seem that



Dürer and Leonardo were Zeuxis and Apelles reborn, that Michelangelo was a new Phidias? Did not science set order among the stars, and promulgate new laws for the terrestrial globe? Gold, streaming from freshly discovered continents, created fabulous wealth, and this wealth begot new arts. Gutenberg's invention made the production of books so easy that the word of enlightenment could spread over the whole surface of the earth. Ah, it could not be long now, cried Erasmus and his disciples gleefully, before mankind, so lavishly endowed by the products of its own energies, would recognize its mission, its ethical purpose here below—to live in fraternal concord, to act uprightly, and to extirpate every vestige of the bestiality handed down from its animal ancestry. Ulrich von Hutten's cry sounded like a trumpet call over the land: "It is a joy to be alive!" From the pinnacles of the Erasmian temple the citizens of a new world looked down upon a new Europe, and saw the sun rising on the horizon of the future, a light announcing that at long last, after a weary eternity of spiritual darkness, the day of universal peace was at hand.

But they were mistaken. The dawn was not the holy one they expected to shine over a gloomy earth: on the contrary, the light came from the brand which was to destroy with incendiary force the ideal world so confidently expected by the humanists. As the Germanic hordes of old swept down upon the world of classical Rome, so Luther, the fanatical man of action, backed by the irresistible force of a mass movement, sallied forth to swamp and to destroy this supranational dream. Ere ever the humanists had properly set about inaugurating their schemes for world unity, the Reformation disrupted the intellectual harmony of Europe, destroyed the *ecclesia universalis*, shattering the whole fancied structure as with the blows of a Titan's hammer.

## Chapter 7

### THE TITANIC ADVERSARY

**S**ELDOM do those decisive forces, destiny and death, visit man without a warning. Before every visit they send an envoy bearing a message, so softly spoken that the words go unheeded by the recipient. Among the innumerable letters of sympathy and respect which Erasmus received and which for so many years covered his writing-table, there came one, under date December 11, 1516, from Spalatinus, secretary to the Elector of Saxony. In the course of a laudatory epistle interspersed with erudite comments, Spalatinus wrote that there was a young Augustinian friar in the town who felt a great respect for Erasmus's teaching but who differed from the master on the question of Original Sin. He was not a follower of Aristotle on the point that a man was righteous because he behaved righteously, but held that a man was righteous if he were given occasion to act righteously: "a person needs first a change of heart, then good works will ensue."

This letter is one of the minute stones which go to the composition of the vast mosaic known as the history of man. For the first time, though indirectly, Dr. Martin Luther—for the young Augustinian friar was none other than he—addressed the great master, and his initial protest already touched the central point around which the two paladins of the Reformation were in later years to fight as enemies. At the time when he received the letter, Erasmus paid little heed to the impressions it conveyed. How should he, busy as he always was, wooed by

the whole intellectual world, find time to dispute on theological matters with an obscure monk in the depths of Saxony? He passed the information by, little knowing that the hour had struck when his own life and that of the world at large were to take a new turn. So far he had stood alone, master of Europe and master of the new interpretation of the Gospels: now a mighty opponent had arisen. With gentle finger, hardly audible, Martin Luther tapped at the door of Erasmus's heart; his name had not yet been mentioned, but before long that name was to sound throughout the world as the heir and conqueror of Erasmus.

This first encounter between Luther and Erasmus took place in the abstract world; and never in subsequent years were they destined to meet in person. A kind of instinct made the two men avoid one another. And yet their names were frequently coupled, their portraits appeared side by side, they were both proclaimed the rescuers from the Roman yoke, and extolled as the first honest German reformers. History has deprived us of a magnificent dramatic episode, for it would truly have been a moving sight to see these two meet face to face in controversy. Seldom does destiny produce such fundamentally contrasted men as Erasmus and Luther, differing completely both as to character and as to physique. In flesh and blood, in norm and form, in mental capacity and in conduct of life, from the outward bodily manifestation to the finest of nerve-fibres they hailed from different and hostile races, so far as habit of body and mind were concerned. The conciliatory temperament as opposed to the fanatical, cosmopolitanism against nationalism, evolution versus revolution.

Let us consider the exterior differences. Luther, son of a miner and offspring of peasant stock, enjoying per-



fect health, palpitating with life, indeed shaken by the storm of his inborn energies, full of vitality and the grosser lusts such vitality entails—"I gorge like a Bohemian and gulp down my liquor like a German"—a swaggering, brimming, almost bursting piece of living matter, the embodiment of the momentum and fierceness of a whole nation assembled in one exuberant personality. When he raised his voice it was as if an organ with all the stops out roared; every word was racy, pungent, spiced, like the rye bread, freshly baked, we find on the German peasant's table; all the elements may be sensed therein—the soil with its peculiar odour and its springs, with its manures and dungs—wild as a hurricane, disturbing, disquieting, the mighty voice raged over the German land. Luther's genius was to be found in his sensual vehemence rather than in his intellectual capacities. Just as he spoke, not dead Latin, but his live, native German—though with the addition of an amazing gift for vivid imagery—so also did he think in the same way as the folk to which he belonged, guiding the will of the masses to the highest potential of passion. He was redolent of the Teutonic peoples, of the protesting and rebellious German instinct pushing itself into the consciousness of the world; and, since the nation accepted his ideas, Luther became embodied in the history of that nation, giving back to its elements his own elemental and pristine vigour.

Having looked at this stout, thick-set, hard-boiled, full-blooded clod of clay called Luther, having contemplated the man whose low brow expressed the combative force of his will, reminding one of Michelangelo's Moses, having gazed our fill at this man of brawn, let us turn our eyes upon Erasmus the man of intellect. Here we see skin as fine as parchment, silky in texture, thin, the integument of a sensitive and cautious man. Their respective outward and physical aspects suffice to inform

us that between such a couple no enduring friendship or understanding is possible. Sickly, trembling with cold in the shelter of his room, year in year out huddled in furs, perpetually below par (whereas Luther possessed an overplus of health), Erasmus always had too scant an allowance of everything with which his rival was abundantly supplied. Erasmus had to warm his sluggish and anæmic frame with good Burgundian wines, whereas Luther—contrasts in petty things are sometimes the most salient—needed copious draughts of “strong Wittenberg beer” in order to dull his alertness into refreshing slumber at night. When Luther spoke, it was as though the house were filled with the rumble of thunder, the church with a mighty wind, the earth with the uproar of an earthquake; at table, in the company of friends, he would bellow with laughter, and he was so fond of music—indeed, theology alone stood above this love—that he enjoyed lifting up his sonorous voice in song. Erasmus had a weak and gentle voice, resembling that of one suffering from consumption; he carefully trimmed and beautified his sentences, sharpening his words to the finest of points. Luther’s speech rushed forth like a torrent, his quill moved with lightning speed “like a blind horse.” Luther exhaled power; all who came into intimate contact with him, Melanchthon, Spalatinus, and even the Elector, were held in subservience to his domineering and virile personality. Erasmus exercised his power the more when he himself remained in the background; through books and letters, through the written word. He had nothing to thank his body for, wizened, poor, and sickly as it was; all the good he accomplished was due to his lofty, his wide, his all-embracing intellect.

Even the mental equipment of these two men had been fashioned in totally different forges. Unquestionably, Erasmus was a man of wider vision, of profounder



knowledge; nothing was alien to his mind. Clear and colourless as the light of day, his abstract comprehension pierced to the heart of every mystery, illuminating every object it contemplated. Luther's horizon was far more circumscribed, but his penetration went even deeper; his world was narrower, inconceivably narrower, than was Erasmus's universe; but to all his thoughts, to all his convictions he imparted some of the impetus of his own personality. He absorbed everything that came his way, and warmed it in the hot stream of his rich red blood; he fecundated every idea with his own vital energy, imbuing it with fanaticism; and what he had once recognized and accepted, he remained faithful to all his life. Every concept coalesced with his whole being, and to it he imparted the full magnitude of his dynamic strength. Dozens of times did Luther and Erasmus utter the self-same thoughts, but whereas Erasmus exercised a titillating effect upon the minds of intellectuals, Luther's words, thanks to his torrential impetus, immediately became a popular slogan, a call to arms, a formative demand, racing forth into the world like animated fire-brands to kindle the consciences of men. All that Erasmus sought was peace and tranquillity of soul; all that Luther sought was to create a tension and a convulsion of the emotions. Erasmus, the *scepticus*, manifested his greatest strength when he spoke clearly, soberly, and collectedly; Luther, the *pater exstasticus*, was at his best when fury and hatred leapt volcanically from his mouth.

Even when two such antagonistic temperaments work towards the same goal, they are bound to clash. At the outset, both Erasmus and Luther desired the same thing; but their natures were so fundamentally different that they endeavoured to achieve the aim by utterly dissimilar methods. Enmity radiated round Luther. Of all the men of genius who have lived upon this earth, Luther



was, perhaps, the most fanatical, the most unteachable, the most intractable, and the most quarrelsome. He could only tolerate those who were completely acquiescent with his views, so that he could make what use he would of them; those who said him nay served him as targets for his wrath, and provided him with material to grind to powder with his scorn. Erasmus, however, had made antifanaticism a veritable cult, and Luther's harsh, dictatorial tones cut him to the quick. Pummelling, foaming at the mouth, violent words, were to him—the citizen of the world, whose highest aim was to conciliate all men of intelligence—actually and physically unbearable; and Luther's self-confidence (called by Luther himself "my confidence in God") seemed to Erasmus challenging in the extreme and almost blasphemous in a world full of error and illusion. For his part, Luther intensely disliked Erasmus's lukewarmness and indecision in matters of faith, his smooth-tongued pliability, his evasiveness, his lack of conviction which made it impossible to pin him down to some definite and unambiguous pronouncement. The perfect phraseology of the scholar's artistically ornate eloquence was gall and wormwood to the rougher and more downright rival. There was something deep in Luther's nature, and something equally deep in Erasmus's nature; but the two depths were antagonistic. Foolish, indeed, is the notion that nothing but externals and the hazards of life rendered it impossible for these two first apostles of the new interpretation of the Gospels (the "new evangelical teaching" as it is usually styled in Germany) to join forces for the common cause. The differences in colouring matter of blood and tissue of brain made even such likenesses as might have existed of so contrary a hue and shape that the resemblance was lost. The twain were originally different, and there existed no meeting-ground for their mutual collaboration. This dissimilarity penetrated into the

brain and into the plexus of the instincts, through the channels where the blood coursed, or into those depths where conscious thought no longer governs. They could deal gently with one another for reasons of policy and out of consideration for the cause, like two logs carried down on the current of a stream they could drift comfortably side by side, but at the first bend, at the first loop in the river-bed, they were fated to ram one another. The conflict thus arising was inescapable and proved to be of world-wide significance.

As was to be expected, the conqueror in this battle was Luther, not merely because he was the greater genius of the two, but also because he was more used to combat and was a merry fighter. Luther remained all his life of a pugnacious disposition, a born wrestler with God, with man, and with the devil. Warfare was for him not only a pleasure and an outlet for his energies, but likewise a means of salvation from himself. A skirmish, a quarrel, dissension, fisticuffs, were a kind of spiritual blood-letting for Luther; and it was only when he came to blows, only when a tussle was in full swing, that he felt himself to be the man he was and filling to the full his manly measure. With passionate delight, he hurled himself into the fray, whether the cause happened to be a righteous one or an unrighteous one. "An almost deathly shudder runs down my back," writes Bucer, Martin Luther's friend, "when I recall the fury that boils up within the man as soon as he comes face to face with an opponent." It is undeniable that Luther fought like one possessed when he went forth to battle, fought with his whole body, fiercely, with bloodshot eyes, and foam on his lips; and his *furor teutonicus* seemed to act as a purge on the feverish poisons within him. In actual fact, it was only when striking out in a blind frenzy, releasing his anger, that he

felt light-hearted. "My whole bloodstream is refreshed, my *ingenium* becomes clarified, and temptation is laid to rest." In the arena, the erudite *doctor theologiæ* was instantly transformed into a soldier. "As soon as I arrive, I deal blows with my cudgel." A mad uncouthness, a berserker rage, seized upon him; he laid about him with any weapon that came handy, with the shining sword of dialectic or with a pitchfork heaped with dung and boorishness; any impediment to his onslaught he ruthlessly flung aside; and he did not recoil from untruthfulness and calumny if it was a question of laying an adversary low. "If you want to better humanity and reform the Church you cannot afford to fight shy of a good, thumping lie." Chivalry was alien to this peasant fighter. Even when a foe had got his gruelling, Luther could not treat him with generosity or compassion, he continued to drub him in blind rage as the poor thing lay defenceless on the ground. Not for him the adage dear to the English: "Don't hit a man when he is down!" He rejoiced when he learned that Thomas Münzer with ten thousand peasants had been done to death, and boasted that "their blood is on my head"; he shouted with glee when "that swine" Zwingli, together with Karlstadt and all those who opposed his ideas, perished miserably; never once did this hot and mighty hater put in a word to save an enemy condemned to death. From the pulpit his voice rang forth carrying men along in a stream of enthusiasm; in the home he was a cheerful and friendly father and house-master; as an artist in words he gave expression to the magnitude of his cultural attainments; but so soon as battle was joined, Luther was transformed, becoming a werewolf raging with uncouth and unjustifiable scorn and fury. Out of the dire necessity of his nature he was again and again forced into combat; for, not only did he enjoy this, considering it to be the jolliest thing in life, but he looked upon a fight as,



morally, the fairest and justest form of activity. "A man, and especially a Christian, must be a warrior," he said proudly as he gazed at himself in a mirror; and in a letter written in 1541 he raised this concept into the heavens with the strange remark, "Certain is it that God is a sturdy fighter."

Erasmus, as Christian and as humanist, could not conceive of a combative Christ or a fighting God. Hatred and the desire for revenge seemed to him, the aristocrat of culture, a lapse into the plebeian and the barbaric. Any kind of tumult or rioting, every violent discussion, nauseated him. As a born conciliator and mediator, he was as loath to put up a fight as Luther was delighted to enter the battle-ground. Characteristically enough, he once observed in regard to this pusillanimity of his: "If ever I were given a fine estate in the country but had to go through the law courts to enter into possession, I would prefer to renounce the gift." Erasmus certainly loved a discussion among equals, but only as the nobles of old were fain to splinter a lance with their peers; it had to be fine and fair jousting, witty, wise, supple, with weapons steeled in the classical fires and suited to the forum of humanistic culture. To strike a few sparks, to succeed in some fresh ruse, to unhorse your opponent by a gibe at his faulty Latin—such intellectual sport was by no means foreign to Erasmus; but he was never able to understand Luther's exultation in the tourney, never able to see what pleasure the Wittenberg gladiator could take in trampling on a fallen foe; never having in his manifold writings passed beyond the borders of polite expression and decorum, he could not fathom why Luther should give himself up to such "bloodthirsty" hatred in his disputations with antagonists. Erasmus was not only a born pacifist, but his lack of positive conviction in his chosen articles of faith stressed the fact that he was no fighter; objective minds are usually lack-

ing in self-confidence. Doubt comes only too easily to ruffle their clear surfaces, men of that calibre are given to reflecting upon the arguments set before them. But to allow an opponent the chance of uttering a word signifies that you have given him elbow-room, and the only adequate way of fighting is to go at it madly, to draw down the ear-caps of defiance in order not to hear any voice but your own, and to protect your demoniac rage by putting on a hard and scaly skin. To the ecstatic monk, Martin Luther, every person who contradicted him was an emissary from hell, an enemy of Christ, a vile creature, vermin that it was incumbent to destroy; whereas, with Erasmus, even the wildest excess indulged in by an opponent was a matter for pity and regret. Zwingli gave us an admirable picture of the characterological contrasts between these two rivals, comparing Luther to Ajax and Erasmus to Odysseus: Ajax-Luther, typifying the courageous man of war, Odysseus-Erasmus, as he who enters the field of battle at the call of chance, returning home unruffled to the peaceful island of Ithaca, the isle of contemplation, returning from the realm of action to the realm of the spirit, where temporal victories or defeats appear to be void and empty things when likened to the unconquerable and stable actuality of Platonic ideas.

Erasmus knew very well that he was not made for war. If, against the dictates of his own heart, he did enter the fray, he invariably capitulated; for it is ever thus. When an artist or a man of learning exceeds his own limitations and gets in the way of the men of action, the men of might, the men who live for the passing hour, the former's power is reduced. An intellectual cannot afford to take sides, his realm is the realm of equable justice; he must stand above the heat and fury of the contest.



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Erasmus failed to hear the first gentle warnings concerning Luther. Soon, he was compelled to attend, and the new name became engraven in his heart. The sledgehammer blows with which the Augustinian monk nailed his ninety-five theses to the church door at Wittenberg, echoed throughout the land. "As if the angels themselves were acting as messengers," so did the sheets, still damp from the press, pass swiftly from hand to hand. Betwixt night and morning, the name of Martin Luther took its place side by side with that of Erasmus in the mind of the whole German nation, the two representing for their compatriots the most intrepid champions of a free Christian theology. With the instinct of genius, the future protagonist of the people's rights hit upon the very point which was proving a peculiarly sore one to the German folk, and one whereby Rome made its yoke most oppressively felt: the sale of indulgences. There is nothing a nation objects to more keenly than having to pay tribute to a foreign power; in this case, the Church traded upon a fundamental anxiety present in every religious mind, employing agents to sell papal indulgences on commission, engaging professional salesmen to convert the papal notes into coin of the realm. That the hard-earned money of peasants and artisans should travel across the frontiers to fill the chests of the Roman curia had long rankled, and a mute indignation was prevalent everywhere. Luther, by his challenge, merely set light to the conflagration. The materials for a bonfire were already piled. Nothing shows more clearly that it is not reproof of a wrong, but the form the reproof takes, which is of historical importance. Erasmus, too, and many a humanist, had expostulated against these sales, against the whole idea of buying yourself free from purgatorial fires, and had emptied the vials of their scorn upon the absurd business. But derision and laughter exist only as negative forces, they are not capable of assemb-



ling energies for a creative impact. Luther, however, was of a dramatic temperament; I feel inclined even to say that his was the only genuinely dramatic nature in the whole of German history. This gave him the where-withal to make drastic use of primitive and unteachable instincts, to render his thoughts comprehensible to everyone; from the first, he possessed that which has always proved irresistibly attractive to the masses, the eloquent and plastic gestures of a born orator, the happy phrase which is easily turned into a slogan. When he curtly and clearly declared in these theses, "the pope cannot forgive sin," or "the pope can mitigate no penance except that which he himself has imposed," these words were lightning-flashes of illumination. Like thunder they roared down into the consciences of men, making the basilica of St. Peter in Rome sway beneath the storm. Whereas Erasmus and his disciples, by their mockery and their criticism, aroused the attention of the learned without ever reaching so much as the periphery of the masses, Luther at one stroke penetrated to the depths of folk-feeling and folk-passion. Within two years of the publication of his theses, Luther had become a symbol typifying the German nation, the tribune denouncing all that spelled Rome, the promulgator of the wishes and demands of the people, the concentrated force of every opposition.

A contemporary as keen-eared and as clear-sighted as Erasmus must indubitably have heard very soon of Luther's action. It should have gladdened his heart to know that an ally of such calibre was at hand, and that he possessed a comrade who would fight shoulder to shoulder for free theology. At first, no word of censure passed Erasmus's lips. "The good must love Luther for his courage," and "Luther, so far, has certainly been of use to the world"—it was in these kindly, noncommittal phrases, when in conversation with his humanistic

friends, that he referred to Luther's apparition. Still, even at the start, Erasmus gave cautious expression to a slight scruple when he said, "Luther has criticized many abuses admirably," adding with a sigh, "if only he could have done so with more moderation." A sensitive man like Erasmus always perceives the danger of an over-fervid temperament such as Luther's. He sent out urgent warnings, begging his rival to use somewhat greater discretion. "It seems to me that gentleness achieves more than turbulence. It was through gentleness that Christ conquered the world." Thus, Erasmus was not disquieted by the actual words Luther spoke, nor by the phrasing of the theses, but by the tone of the ex-Augustinian's discourses, the demagogic and fanatical form which pervaded the man's every action. Such thorny problems in theology are, maintained Erasmus, best discussed quietly and among persons of trained intelligence; the *profanum vulgus* should be held aloof by the use of the academic language—Latin. Theology should not be argued about from the house-tops and at every street corner; shopkeepers and cobblers were not fitted to discuss subtle things they were unable to understand. Every discussion held in public was considered by the humanists to lower the level of that same discussion, and inevitably to incur the risk of degenerating into *tumultus*, into a riot of popular excitement. Propaganda and agitational work was proper and right, and Erasmus believed in their unflagging power. It seemed to him that once an idea had been launched upon the world by means of the written or spoken word, its significance and purport should be spread abroad along spiritual and intellectual paths; that it did not need the approbation of the masses or the formation of a party to render it truer and more actual. A man of intellect had, such was Erasmus's conviction, nothing other to do in this world than to determine and elucidate truths; his

not to march forth and fight for these truths. It was not envy, as many have maintained, but a feeling of genuine and honest anxiety, a sense of intellectually aristocratic responsibility, which led Erasmus to demur, for he saw that the storm of words uttered by Luther would be followed by a dust-cloud raised by the excited masses who would follow in the great leader's wake. "If only he could be more moderate," Erasmus complained over and over again, feeling in his bones with the prophetic instinct of the wise that his sublimely spiritual realm of *bonæ litteræ*, the sciences and the humanistic movement, would not be able to stand up against such a tempest. Even so, Luther and Erasmus never directly corresponded with one another; always did these two most noted masters of the German Reformation maintain an impenetrable silence one towards the other. Little by little so obstinate a silence became manifest to everyone. Erasmus, the cautious, had no inclination to make personal acquaintance with this unaccountable fellow; and as for Luther, the deeper his own convictions led him into the fray, the more he looked askance at his sceptical contemporary. "Human affairs mean more to him than divine things," Luther wrote of Erasmus—showing with a masterly stroke of the pen the distance that lay between them: for Luther, the religious was the thing of greatest importance on earth; for Erasmus it was the human.

But by this time, Luther stood no longer alone. Without any active desire on his part, perhaps without even realizing what his initial efforts were leading to, he had become the exponent of our many-sided terrestrial interests, the battering-ram of German nationalist aspirations, and an important piece on the political chessboard in the game between the pope, the emperor, and the numerous German princes. His demands had been made



with a view to the spiritual reform of the Church. Now, after his first success, a number of persons whose outlooks were utterly foreign to his purpose and whose ideas were far from being evangelical in complexion, gathered round Luther to pick up any advantages that might accrue and thus to exploit the great man for their own purposes. Gradually, a nucleus formed itself around the master, handy material for a future party, preparing the way for the advent of a new religious system. But long before the massed troops of Protestantism were assembled, a general staff had been formed, among whom were Melanchthon, Spalatinus, priests, aristocrats, and scholars. Ambassadors from other lands looked on inquisitively to see what would be the upshot of these activities in Electoral Saxony, wondering whether this ruthless fellow might not be fashioned into a wedge to be hammered into the structure of the empire. A finely meshed web of political diplomacy was slowly being woven round Luther's purely ethical and moral claims. His intimate circle of adherents was on the look out for allies, and Melanchthon, who knew very well what an uproar the publication of Luther's *An Address to the Nobility of the German Nation* would create, pressed the demand that so noteworthy an authority as Erasmus, celebrated for his unpartisanship throughout the scholarly world, should be won over to the evangelical cause. In the end Luther yielded, and on March 28, 1519, he for the first time addressed himself personally to Erasmus.

Flattery and an excess of polite diction were such habitual phenomena among humanistic correspondents that we need not be surprised at the exaggerated self-abasement expressed in the opening sentences of this celebrated letter. "What man alive has not his mind full of thoughts concerning Erasmus? Whom has he not taught, whom does he not govern?" And the

writer went on to describe himself as a dull, fat fellow with unwashed hands, who had not yet learned how to compose a letter suitable for perusal by so great a scholar as Erasmus. But since he had been told that his name was not wholly unknown to Erasmus—owing probably to his (Luther's) insignificant remarks anent indulgences—persistent silence between the two seemed no longer possible if malevolent tongues were not to be set wagging. "I would beseech you therefore, most benevolent of men, that you deign to notice this poor little brother in Christ, who is certainly unworthy your attention since his ignorance keeps him buried away in a dark corner, and who can claim no right to live under the same heaven and the same sun as you. . . ." The whole letter was written in order to lead up to this sentence. It contains all that Luther hoped to gain from Erasmus, which was a letter of acquiescence, a word of friendly approval of the writer's teaching, a line which would be (as we say nowadays) of "publicity value." The moment was a dark one for Luther and decisive for his whole future; he had declared war against the powers that be; the Bull *Exurge Domine* was lying at Rome ready to be launched upon him at any time. To have Erasmus at his side as moral supporter would be a significant gain, and might, indeed, be a decisive factor in the victorious outcome of the Lutheran cause—for Erasmus's name was associated in all men's minds with complete incorruptibility. A non-party man is invariably the most important asset for the party man, and the finest standard round which to rally sympathizers.

But Erasmus was always loath to shoulder responsibility, and felt disinclined to stand security for an incalculable debt. If he agreed with Luther in this instance, he would pledge himself to acquiesce in everything the hothead should set down in future books and pamphlets and attacks, would consent to everything this



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immoderate and incurable creature might wish to promulgate, an author whose "violent and inciting manner of writing" was painfully irritating to the preacher of concord and unanimity. Besides, what was Luther's cause? The promise to take a person's part, to rally to his side, would mean the sacrifice of one's own moral freedom, the acceptance of certain demands whose consequences none could possibly foresee. Erasmus would never consent to having his liberty of action or of thought curtailed. Maybe, too, the scholar's keen ecclesiastical sense of smell had nosed out a slightly heretical scent in Luther's writings. To compromise himself unnecessarily was not Erasmus's way, if he could help it; his cautious disposition had deprived him of the power to give himself whole-heartedly to any cause.

He was careful, therefore, when replying, to furnish his correspondent with neither a plain Yes nor a definite No, but to build a redoubt from behind which he could peer to right and to left, hemming and hawing, and informing Luther that he had not read the latter's writings carefully enough to give an opinion. In actual fact, wrote Erasmus, since he had been ordained a priest of the Roman Catholic dispensation, it was strictly forbidden him to read any work antagonistic to the Church. Thus he provided himself with a clever excuse for evading the issue. He thanked his "brother in Christ," telling him of the immense excitement Luther's books had raised in Louvain and how hatefully those in disagreement were behaving—by this means Erasmus was able to hint in which direction his own sympathies lay. It is a masterly piece of composition, and, reading it to-day, one realizes that this passionately independent man was determined to give no clear and definite word which would supply his correspondent with a pretext for pinning him down and making any further claim upon him. Referring to Luther's Commentary on the Psalms, he wrote, "I



have only fluttered the pages" (*degustavi*), i.e. he had not read this work either. He hoped that it would prove of great utility—again an evasive wish and conveying no definite judgment. Then, in order to widen the distance between Luther and himself, Erasmus made fun of the rumour that he was one of the committee engaged upon composing an indictment against Luther's works; the notion was ludicrous and malevolent. At the close however, Erasmus became clear-spoken. Curtly and without circumlocution he declared that he had no wish to be drawn into the discussion. "So far as may be I wish to keep neutral (*integrum*) in order to continue to do my share in promoting the nascent sciences; and I believe that a shrewdly manipulated reticence will achieve more than impetuous interference." Urgently he begged Luther to show more moderation, winding up with the pious and noncommittal hope that Christ might endow the Augustinian from day to day with an increasing measure of His divine spirit.

Therewith Erasmus took his stand, the same he had taken during the Reuchlin affair when he proclaimed: "I am not a member of Reuchlin's party; indeed I refuse to have anything to do with party. I am a Christian and recognize the existence of fellow-Christians. But I refuse to be either a Reuchliner or an Erasmian." He was determined not to budge an inch farther than he wished to go. He was of an anxious turn of mind; but anxiety sharpens the faculty of observation so that it often brings sudden and clairvoyant prevision of coming events. Possessing greater clarity of vision than any of the other humanists who were then acclaiming Luther as a saviour, Erasmus was quick to recognize in Luther's aggressive and unqualified methods the omen of *tumultus*; he saw that what was likely to take place was a revolution rather than a reformation, and he would on no account enter these dangerous paths. "How should

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I be able to help Luther by merely turning myself into a companion in danger? By so doing I should lead two men to their deaths instead of one. . . . He has said a few excellent things, he has given good warning. How I wish he had not interfered with the working of these pre-eminent achievements by falling into his insufferable errors. . . . But even if he had said what he had to say in polite and decorous language, I would not have deliberately placed my head in danger for truth's sake. Not every one has the strength for martyrdom; and I am afraid I must sadly admit that, were a tumult to occur, I should act the part of Peter. I obey the decrees of popes and princes when I feel that they are just, and I tolerate their bad laws because such an attitude is the safer. A similar attitude, I firmly believe, might with advantage be adopted by all those who feel that resistance would prove hopeless." It was due no less to his spiritual faint-heartedness than to his unshakable desire for independence that Erasmus took the resolution never to fight for any cause in common with others, Luther's not excepted. Luther must go his own way, and Erasmus must be allowed to go his; they therefore came to an agreement that neither should enter into open conflict with the other. The offer of an alliance having been rejected, they concluded a pact of mutual tolerance. Luther's rôle was to furnish the dramatic element, and Erasmus hoped—vainly as it proved!—to be permitted to play the part of onlooker, of "spectator." "If God, as may be surmised by the magnificent swing with which Luther's cause has gone forward, wishes that matters should run this course and needs a rough-handed surgeon like Luther to heal the sores of a degenerate epoch, it is not for me to question His wisdom."

Nevertheless, in times of war it is a harder task to keep out of the fray and to preserve a perfect mental poise than to take sides; and, much to his vexation,

Erasmus found himself between the cross-fires of parties each of which wanted to claim him as adherent. Erasmus started the criticism which was launched against the Church, but Luther transformed criticism into an active onslaught upon the papacy, so that a motto coined by Catholic theologians became current even during Erasmus's lifetime: "Erasmus laid the egg and Luther hatched it." Willy-nilly, Erasmus was the precursor, making the path smooth for Luther's valiant deeds: *Ubi Erasmus innuit, illic Luther irruit*. Where Erasmus was content cautiously to set the door ajar, Luther turbulently flung it wide. Erasmus himself had to admit, when writing to Zwingli: "Everything which Luther is demanding, I, too, have taught, but not so vociferously and without going to such extremes of language." Method alone divided these two men. They both made the same diagnosis: that the Church was in mortal peril of a hopeless inward rot while preserving the outward semblance of stability. But whereas Erasmus proposed gradual amelioration, a careful and progressive course of blood-cleansing by means of the salt injections of reason and mockery, Luther went at the patient with the bistoury and made a bold incision. Such a dangerous intervention very naturally left Erasmus breathless with alarm, especially since he had a horror at the sight of blood. He strongly opposed such drastic measures. "I am resolved rather to let them pull me to pieces, limb by limb, than to give my sanction to dissensions, especially where questions of religious belief are concerned. I know that many of Luther's followers act upon the saying, 'I come not to send peace, but a sword.' Though I see much in the Church that it might advantage religion to change, I am averse to any action which might lead to commotion and uproar." With the determination worthy of a Tolstoi, he refused to admit that an appeal to force was legitimate, declaring himself ready



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to continue suffering an abuse rather than to raise a *tumultus* by resorting to violence and bloodshed. While his fellow-humanists, more shortsighted and optimistic than he, were welcoming Luther's deed as an act of liberation for the Church and as the redemption of Germany, Erasmus realized that it would mean the disruption of the *ecclesia universalis*, the creation of a national church in lieu of a worldwide Church, and the severance of Germany from participation in the unity of the West. His heart told him what he could hardly have understood through reason alone, that such a severance of Germany and the other Teutonic countries from the papal dominion could not be brought about except through one of the bloodiest and most homicidal conflicts the world had ever known. Since war spelled for him a step backward in the progress of civilization, a lapse into the barbarism of epochs long since outlived, he put all his strength into the scale to prevent this ultimate catastrophe from overtaking Christianity. With this resolve firmly established in his mind, Erasmus took on a duty of historical significance, a duty which, it must be confessed, exceeded his capacity: alone, amid the multitudinous exacerbations of the day, he set himself the task of incorporating the spirit of unclouded reason, to defend the unity of Europe, the unity of the Church, the unity of mankind, and the world-citizenship of humanity with the pen as his only weapon, and thus to protect all he loved against decay and annihilation.

Erasmus began his self-appointed mission by endeavouring to put a curb upon Luther. Through the intermediation of mutual friends he besought Luther to be less incendiary in his writings, to teach the Gospel in less "unevangelical" terms. "I wish Luther could make up his mind to forgo quarrelling for a while, and could

deal with evangelical reform without mixing it with other things. He would thus achieve even greater success." Above all, it was unwise to discuss every question in public; especially, the demand for reforms within the Church was not a suitable subject to shout about from the house-tops to a contentious and brawling mob. The diplomat in Erasmus led him to belaud that virtue of the man of intellect, the sublime art of silence at the proper season in contradistinction to the agitator's art of oratory. "We must not invariably tell the whole truth. Much depends upon how truth is made known."

The mere suggestion that truth might be withheld for mundane advantages, were it but for a moment, was, it need hardly be said, utterly incomprehensible to Luther. For him it seemed the highest duty that every iota, every syllable of the truth a man's heart and mind had once accepted must be confessed, must be shouted aloud no matter if a war, a tumult, or the falling-down of the firmament should result therefrom. The art of keeping silence was not to be acquired by a Luther, nor did Martin Luther wish to learn it. During the four years since his theses were published he had learned a new and mighty speech; immeasurable powers, indeed the full tide of popular resentment, had come to his support; the Germans' awareness of themselves as a nation, their revolutionary eagerness to be in arms against foreigners and the empire, their hatred of priests and of outsiders, the sullen social and religious fervour which since the peasant revolts, with their ominous watchword *Bundschuh, Bundschuh, Bundschuh*, had been fermenting among the countryfolk—all this had been roused to activity by Luther's hammer-blows upon the church door at Wittenberg. Each estate, princes and peasants and burghers alike, felt that their personal claims and their rights as citizens had been hallowed by the Gospels. The entire nation, hitherto rent by local squabbles, put its



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passionate trust in Luther because in him it saw a man of courage and of action. Now, whenever the national cause and social demands are mixed in the same crucible with religious ecstasy, an earthquake is engendered, shaking the world to its foundations; and should, moreover (as was the case with Luther), a man appear at the appropriate hour whom the multitude can recognize as the embodiment of their own unconscious will, that man will become the vehicle of magical powers. He who, at a word, is chosen to guide the mighty energies of a nation, is often tempted to look upon himself as a messenger from the godhead. Thus after incalculable years a man arose in Germany speaking with the tongue of the prophets. "God has commanded me to teach and judge here in Germany as did the apostles and evangelists of old." From God's very self the mission had been received to cleanse the Church of its abuses and to deliver the German peoples out of the hands of "anti-Christ," of the pope, "that popinjayed and tangible devil"—to deliver by means of the word and, if that means failed, then by way of the sword and fire and blood.

To preach caution and discretion to ears that are deafened by the joyous uproar of a nation and into which God has whispered His divine injunctions, is obviously to waste one's breath. Soon Luther came to pay no heed whatsoever to what Erasmus wrote or thought; the younger man no longer needed the older. With iron strides, and inexorably, Luther marched forward along the path which destiny had traced for him.

With the same energy he had expended in warning Luther, Erasmus now turned to admonish the other side—pope, bishops, princes, and those set in authority. In this camp, too, he beheld his ancient enemy at work, beheld fanaticism rampant, a fanaticism utterly incapable of recognizing wherein it erred. He suggested that



the papal ban had, perhaps, been premature; that Luther was a thoroughly honest and upright man, whose tenor of life was praised by all and sundry. True, Luther had entertained doubts concerning the validity of indulgences, but others before him had raised objections to them. "Not every error need be heretical," cried this born mediator, thereby vindicating Luther's attitude. Even though writing about his bitterest foe, Erasmus could still declare that "Luther acted precipitately, maybe, but certainly not with evil intent." In such circumstances, it was not imperative to clamour immediately for the stake, and not every suspect could be rightfully accused of heresy. Would not the wiser course be to give Luther a warning, and to enlighten him rather than to insult and irritate him? "The best way of coming to terms," he wrote to Cardinal Campeggio, "would be for the pope to instruct each party to make a public declaration of faith. By such a method the danger of false statement would be overcome, and the wild talk and exaggerated writings be mitigated." Again and again he urged that a Council be convoked, that a private assembly be called together, and that the theses be discussed among scholars whose aim should be to bring the matter to an issue "conformable with the spirit of Christianity."

But Rome paid as little attention to this warning voice as to the wordy fireworks of Wittenberg. The pope was busied with other cares than these: his beloved Raphael Sanzio, the divinest gift of the Renaissance to the new times, died suddenly at this juncture. Who would now finish the Vatican cartoons? Who would step forward to complete the decoration of St. Peter's, a work so boldly conceived and so magnificently begun? To the popes of the Medici family, art was greater and more enduring and a hundredfold more important than a pettifogging dispute among churchmen in an obscure

town in the province of Saxony; and precisely because the reigning pope was a man of wide vision, he failed to see the significance of the gesticulating little monk who was busily undermining the papal realm. His cardinals, arrogant and self-confident—had they not a couple of decades earlier successfully committed Savonarola to the flames and ruthlessly expelled the heretics from Spain?—insisted, however, that the edict against Luther should be launched as the only suitable answer to the German zealot's insubordinate behaviour. Why should he first be given a hearing? Why bother any further about this peasant theologian? Erasmus's warning went unheeded; his letters were pigeon-holed and forgotten; the papal bull against Luther was issued; the legate was told to deal ruthlessly with the German insurgents: from the outset, obstinacy to the right, obstinacy to the left made conciliation between the two camps impossible of achievement.

Yet in these decisive days—and hitherto historians have been prone to neglect the study of the background against which the events were enacted—the destiny of the German Reformation was for a while entirely in Erasmus's hands. Emperor Charles had summoned the Diet of Worms. Here the Luther affair was to be liquidated, unless he yielded at the eleventh hour. Frederick, the Elector of Saxony, Luther's liege lord, was also invited, and though he did not as yet openly champion the reformer's cause, he was resolved to give what protection he could. He was a strange fellow, this ruler of Saxony, for he was a faithful son of Mother Church, the greatest collector of relics and of bones of the saints in the whole of Germany, a respecter of things which Luther scorned as baubles and devilish trickery, and yet he harboured sympathy for the reformer, he

was proud of the man who had brought so much renown to the university of Wittenberg. Not having quite made up his mind which camp to enter, he kept prudently in the background, and did not have personal dealings with Luther. As with Erasmus, so with Frederick: the Elector did not receive the reformer, so that in case of need he might be able to declare: "Personally, I have had nothing to do with him." From political motives, however, and because he saw that this vigorous peasant might well serve his turn in his schemes against the emperor, and, furthermore, out of particularist pride in his powers of jurisdiction, he had so far held a protective hand over Luther's head, so that in spite of papal pronouncements of outlawry the Augustinian continued to preach from the pulpit and still held his university chair.

At last, however, even this protection was imperilled, for should the Diet place Luther under the ban of the empire, then any further protection the Elector should choose to offer would be looked upon as rebellion of a liege man against his suzerain. To an open breach of this kind none of the early, half-protestant princes were inclined to resort. They knew that from the military point of view the emperor was powerless, for his armies were in the field against France and Italy. Thus the moment might be propitious for increasing one's personal power and for striking a blow in the evangelical cause. History was unlikely to offer a more splendid opportunity. But Frederick, who was a pious and upright man, did not yet feel certain whether this priest and professor was in verity a herald of evangelical teaching or merely another of the numerous religious enthusiasts and sectarians. He could not decide whether before God and before earthly reason he could make himself further responsible in regard to this great and yet menacing spirit.



## THE TITANIC ADVERSARY

Such was Frederick's mood when, on his way through Cologne, he learned that Erasmus was staying in that city. He lost no time in dispatching Spalatinus, his secretary, to Erasmus's lodgings, to invite the famous humanist to an interview—for Erasmus was still looked upon as the highest moral authority in worldly and in theological matters, and he still enjoyed the honestly won reputation of being absolutely impartial. The elector expected to receive the wisest of counsels to allay his own uncertainty. He asked a straight question: Is Luther right or wrong? Such a question needed a straight answer. But Erasmus was not fond of Yes and No; especially was it inconvenient in this case, seeing the immense responsibility he would be taking upon himself. If by his utterance he sanctioned Luther's deeds and words, then the Elector, fortified by Erasmus's approval, would continue to shield his protégé, and the German Reformation would be saved. On the other hand, should Luther's liege lord decide to leave the disturber of the peace in the lurch, the latter's only course would be flight if he were to escape being burned alive. The destiny of a world swung on this Yes or No, and had Erasmus really been envious of or antagonistic to his great colleague, as many maintain that he was, now if ever he was given the chance to rid himself of a turbulent rival. A sharp, unconciliatory word would probably have decided the Elector to withdraw his protection. On that day, November 5, 1520, the fate of the German Reformation, the whole future story of mankind, probably lay between Erasmus's delicate and timid hands.

Erasmus's attitude in that fateful hour was dignified and honourable. It was not a courageous attitude, nor a great, nor a decisive, nor a heroic attitude; but it certainly was an honourable one—and that is already something fine. When the Elector asked him whether he considered Luther's outlook wrong-headed or heretical,

Erasmus, determined not to take sides, said jestingly that Luther's main mistake had been to attack the pope by threatening the tiara, and the monks through laying hands on their bellies. Then, being earnestly besought to give a serious reply, he set forth his ideas concerning Luther's doctrines in twenty-two short propositions which he named *Axiomata*. Occasional sentences ring a trifle censorious, such as "Luther misjudges the leniency of the pope." But in the more important conclusions Erasmus stood courageously by the side of his threatened colleague. "Among the many universities, two only have been found to condemn Luther, and even these did not confute him. Luther is, therefore, only demanding his due when he asks for an open discussion and unprejudiced judges." Again: "The best would be for the pope to have the affair adjusted by trustworthy judges of good standing. The world is thirsting after a true gospel, and the whole tendency of the day is towards that. One should not go against the spirit of the times in so spiteful a fashion." His concluding advice was that all parties should show themselves flexible, that a public council should be summoned to discuss this thorny problem before it led to a *tumultus* which would unsettle the world for centuries to come.

With these words—for which Luther was by no means as grateful as he might have been—a fresh turn had been given to the Reformation, a turn which was to its advantage. For though there are a few ambiguities and unduly guarded phrases in Erasmus's presentation, the Elector acted precisely as Erasmus had proposed during that night's lengthy conversation. Next day, November 6th, Frederick asked the papal legate to hold a public inquiry, to appoint trustworthy and unshackled judges, and not to have Luther's books burned before the matter had been thoroughly thrashed out. Simultaneously, he entered a protest against the harsh standpoint of Rome and



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the emperor, thereby for the first time voicing the Protestantism of the German princes. By working behind the scenes, Erasmus was able in a weighty hour to give decisive help, and this secret intervention has earned him a monument rather than the stones which have been hurled against him.

Followed the Diet of Worms, an epoch-making event. The town was full, every house packed to the roof and even to the tops of the gables to witness the entry of the young emperor, who had been crowned only a few months earlier. He was accompanied by legates, ambassadors, electors, secretaries, surrounded by the gaily hued accoutrements of riders and lansquenets. A few days later a monk entered by the same path, an insignificant fellow under the pope's ban, protected from being caught and burned at the stake by a letter of safe-conduct which lay carefully wrapped in his wallet. Yet once more the streets rang with shouts of joyous welcome. One of these men, the emperor, had been chosen by the princes as leader; the other had been elected to that position by the German nation.

At the first session, the Diet postponed the fateful decision. Erasmus's idea was still full of vitality, and a faint hope prevailed that some means of conciliation might be found. On the second day Luther uttered his famous "Here stand I; I can no otherwise." The world was rent in twain. For the first time since, more than a hundred years earlier, John Huss's defence before the Council of Constance, a man had faced the emperor and the court of Rome, and had refused to submit. A slight shiver ran through the assembly; they marvelled and wondered that a trumpery monk should dare to be so insubordinate. The common folk, however, gave Luther whole-hearted applause. Could they have already suspected such stubborn resistance to mean that a favourable wind was likely to start blowing in their direction?



Could these stormy petrels have guessed that war was at hand?

But where was Erasmus during the hour of doom? It is tragical to relate that he was sitting tranquilly within the four walls of his study. He who had been Jerome Aleander's friend in their young days, who had shared bed and board with him in Venice, he who had been *persona grata* with the recently-crowned emperor, and was a sympathizer with evangelical views, was the only man who could have influenced the situation, and at least have obtained a postponement of sentence. But he dreaded a public appearance, and it was not until the evil tidings were brought to him that he realized the irrevocable nature of his lost opportunity. "If I had been present, I should have done the impossible, to prevent this tragedy occurring, and to bring about a moderate decision." But the decisive moments in history are never repeated. The absent are always wrong. Because in this dread hour Erasmus did not put his weight into the scale on the side of reform, did not, with the whole force of his personality, his powers, and his presence, influence the assembly, because he failed in this moment of utmost need, his own cause was lost for ever. Luther, however, fought his fight with the utmost courage and with unstinted strength; he put his whole heart into the defence: therefore was his will transformed into action.

## Chapter 8

### STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

ERASMUS imagined—and most of his contemporaries shared his outlook—that the Diet of Worms, the ban of outlawry issued by the pope, and the ban of the empire proclaimed by the young emperor, would have settled Luther's activities for ever. The only course that remained open was rebellion against Church and State, a new Albigenian or Waldensian or Hussite conflagration. This solution spelled war, and war was an activity Erasmus wanted above all to avoid. His dream had been to reform from within the evangelical teaching of Mother Church, and he would gladly have given his support to any movement of the kind he contemplated. "If Luther remains within the fold of the Church, I shall be happy to rally to his side," he declared in public. But with one blow and a wrench the fiery Titan had severed his connexions with Rome. Erasmus's dream was at an end. "The Luther tragedy is finished. Ah, that it had never been staged!" Thus did our lover of peace exclaim in the bitterness of his disillusionment. The tiny flame of evangelical inquiry had been snuffed out, the star of intellectual freedom had set, *actum est de stellula lucis evangelicæ*. Henceforward the familiars of the Inquisition and the heavy artillery would have to decide the issue. Erasmus, feeling himself too weak to stand so great a test, decided to keep in the background of events. Humbly he recognized that he did not possess sufficient faith either in God or in himself to take part in this vast and momentous struggle. "Zwingli and Bucer may be

able to understand the language of the spirit, but Erasmus, being no more than an ordinary mortal, is unable to learn this tongue." Erasmus was now a man in his fifties; he had long since realized that the problem concerning God and things divine was an insoluble one, and he did not feel called upon to be spokesman in the forthcoming struggle. He desired to serve only in the realm where clarity of mind held sway, he wished to serve the sciences and the arts. So he fled from theological discussion, from politics, from ecclesiastical wrangles, shut himself up in his study, and amid the dignified silence of his books he sought to ignore the noisy and unedifying quarrels without. Here he could still be of use to the world. Back, therefore, to your cell, Old Man, and curtain your window against the vagaries of Time! Let others, who feel God's call echoing in their hearts, go forth to battle while you remain in tranquil security championing truth in the serene realm where art and science hold sway. "Even if the corrupt morals of the Roman clergy should demand a remedy out of the common, it is not for me and the likes of me to arrogate to ourselves the business of healers. I would rather suffer things to remain as they are than that through my intervention fresh unrest should arise, an unrest which often achieves quite the contrary of that which its moving spirits had set out to attain. Never have I, nor shall I, become an inciter to or a participator in an insurrection."

Thus Erasmus withdrew from the ecclesiastical hurly-burly into the serene domains of art, science, and his own work. He felt nauseated by the continued yapping and disputing of the factions. "*Consulo quieti meæ,*" peace will I have, the "*otium cum dignitate,*" the dignified ease of the scholar. But he reckoned without the world, and this refused to give him what he wanted. There are epochs wherein neutrality is stigmatized as a crime; during times of extreme political excitement the world in-



sists upon a clear Yes or No, an affirmation of support or of disapproval, a distinct declaration of "I am for Luther or I am for the pope." The town of Louvain, where he now lived, made it difficult for him to secure the peace he so greatly desired; and whereas Reformation Germany blamed him for his Laodicean attitude towards Luther's teaching, the Catholic faculty of Louvain nicknamed him the promoter of the "Luther plague." The students, always champions of extremism, whether reactionary or revolutionary, made violent demonstrations against Erasmus, overturning his chair at the university; meanwhile, from every pulpit in the town, the priests fulminated against him, and his erstwhile comrade Aleander, the papal legate, was hard put to it to bring this public condemnation to a close. Courage, as I have said before, was not one of Erasmus's virtues; he chose, therefore, to flee the city rather than to fight the issue. Just as in earlier days he had fled from the Black Death, so now did he flee from the hatred of the city where for many years he had carried on his labours. The old nomad packed his few belongings, and started on his migrations once more. "I shall have to be careful not to let the Germans, who act as though they were possessed by the devil, tear me to pieces before I have shaken the dust of their empire off my feet." It has almost invariably been the lot of those who wish to keep outside the confines of partisanship to be driven into the medley.

Henceforward, Erasmus refused to live in any pronouncedly Catholic town or in one that had gone over to the side of the Reformation; his appropriate place was on neutral ground. He went to that perennial asylum of every independent spirit: Switzerland. For many years he stayed in Basle, the very heart of Europe, a quiet,

dignified, and cleanly city, with well-kept streets, with sober and dispassionate inhabitants who paid no allegiance to war-mongering princes, but were democratically free. Here the scholar felt a promise of the serenity he longed for, here was an excellent university; here were colleagues of profound learning, friends who respected him, amanuenses to help him in his work, artists like Holbein; here, above all, was Frobenius the printer, the master-craftsman with whom for many years he had laboured happily side by side. The zeal of those whose pleasure it was to serve him procured him a comfortable house, and for the first time this man of many wanderings found himself installed in something like a home, in a free city where it was delightful to dwell. Here he could live the life of the spirit; this was his true, his real world. Only in such places, where he could write his books undisturbed, only in such places, where these works could be finely and carefully printed, could he feel genuinely happy. Basle became the resting-house of his earthly pilgrimage. He lived in this town longer than in any other, a whole eight years, and with the passage of time the two names, Erasmus and Basle, have become inseparable: one cannot nowadays think of Erasmus without calling up the vision of Basle, or of Basle without picturing Erasmus. His house is still kept intact and preciously conserved, the walls hung with some of Holbein's portraits of the sage which will carry his lineaments down to countless generations to come. In this abode most of Erasmus's finest works were written, above all the *Colloquia*, that sparkling Latin dialogue which was first conceived as a primer for young Frobenius, and was destined to become a Latin text-book for innumerable children during future decades. Here he completed his great edition of the Fathers of the Church, and hence he sent letters to all the corners of the earth. Here, entrenched in the citadel of work, he could pursue his



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labours, untroubled by the clamour without; book after book issued from his pen, and when intellectual Europe wished to look upon its leader it gazed upon the regal city on the farther shores of the Rhine. During the period of Erasmus's residence there, Basle became the intellectual Alsatia. Humanistic pupils gathered round the celebrated scholar, Oecolampadius for instance, Rhenanus, Amerbach. No man of note, no prince, no scholar, no friend of the fine arts ever missed seeking out Erasmus in Frobenius's printing-press or in his house "Zum Lufft"; pilgrims journeyed from France and Germany and Italy in order to see the man they honoured, and watch him at his work. While in Wittenberg and Zurich and at all the other universities the theological warfare raged and stormed, here, in this city, calm prevailed. It seemed to have become the last refuge of the arts and sciences.

Old man, do not deceive yourself, your real day has set, your realm has been ravaged and destroyed. The true combat is outside your study walls; it is a life-and-death struggle; the spirit has become biased, and the opponents have joined battle: a free man, a man of independent mind, a man who holds aloof, can no longer be tolerated. The world war rages and you needs must be either for or against the evangelical renewal; it no longer helps you to sit among your books behind closed windows. Now that, from one end of Europe to the other, Luther has split the Christian world in twain, it behoves you to cease hiding your head in the sand; no longer can you evade the issue by making the childish excuse "I have not read your books." To right and to left the ominous words ring forth: "Who is not for us is against us." When a cosmos is riven, the rift is felt in every human heart. No, Erasmus, it no longer saves you to take to your heels, and soon you will be dislodged from your citadel. The times need men who are not



afraid to state their beliefs frankly; the world wishes to know where Erasmus, its intellectual leader, stands; whether he is for Luther or against him, whether he is for the pope or against him.

A shattering drama is about to fill the stage. The world's ardent desire is to get hold of a man weary of war, and to drag him into the struggle. "It is a misfortune," laments Erasmus at the age of fifty-five, "that this world-wide storm should have caught me unprepared, should have overtaken me at the moment when, weary from my manifold labours, I was looking forward to a period of well-earned rest. Why can I not be allowed to remain an onlooker at this tragedy, for participation in which I feel so ill adapted? Why are they trying to thrust me into a part, when there are so many other people who would gladly appear upon the stage?" At such critical times fame imposes obligations that make it a curse rather than a blessing; an Erasmus is too vividly in the public eye, what he says is too important, for the members of either party, be it left or right, to forgo the possibility of consulting him as an authority. The leaders on both fronts tore and tugged in order to win him to their particular cause. They lured him with offers of money, with flattery; they taunted him for cowardice, hoping thereby to induce him to break his prudent silence; they alarmed him with false reports, saying that in Rome his books had been confiscated and burned; they falsified his letters; they twisted the meaning of his words. In such circumstances, the true worth of a man of independent mind shines brightly forth. Emperor, kings, three popes on one side, while on the other were Luther, Melanchthon, and Zwingli—all urging Erasmus to speak the decisive word. Anything he wished for on this earth would be granted him, if only

he would throw in his lot with one party or the other. He knew that he could have taken his place "in the leading ranks of the Reformation party" if only he would make a clear statement that he was of their way of thinking; he knew, equally well, that he could have been "nominated to a bishopric" if he had consented to write an attack upon Luther. But Erasmus's thoroughly honourable nature revolted against such unqualified and one-sided statements. He could not with a clear conscience champion the cause of the papal Church since he had been one of the first among men then living to shed light upon its abuses, to demand its reform from within; but to the evangelicals, neither, could he give whole-hearted allegiance, since they were not conveying to the world his idea of a Christ of peace, but had gone violently to work. "Continuously they clamour, 'Evangelium, Evangelium!' They alone are to act as interpreters! At one time the Gospels made the savage gentle, robbers benevolent, the quarrelsome peace-loving; those that cursed were converted so that they invoked blessings. But these men, as if possessed, start all kinds of insurrections, and speak evil of many who deserve better. I see before me new impostors and hypocrites, new tyrants, but not a spark of the evangelical spirit." No, to neither party, were it the pope's or were it Luther's, would Erasmus consent to give his adhesion. Peace, peace alone, peace, and again peace; only to be allowed to stand quietly aside, to be able to continue his work of promoting the welfare of mankind. *Consulo quieti meæ.*

But Erasmus's fame was too widespread and the waiting for his confession of faith too eager. From every point of the compass he was implored to come forth and speak the words that would decide the issue for himself and for all the world. To show how profound was the

general belief in his integrity, I need but quote a moving appeal from the very heart of one of the noblest of Germans. Albrecht Dürer, while travelling in the Netherlands, had made Erasmus's acquaintance. When, a few months later, it was bruited abroad that Luther's cause was dead, Dürer looked to Erasmus as the only man alive who was worthy to carry the sacred cause a stage further, and, shaken to the soul, he apostrophized the sage: "O Erasme Roterdame, where art thou? Hear, thou Christian knight; thou must ride forth shoulder to shoulder with the Lord Christ to defend the truth and to earn a martyr's crown. Otherwise thou art nothing but a petty old man. I myself have heard thee say that thou hast a couple of years' good life still in thee and that thou intendest to do something. Well, why not give these two last years to the evangel, to the true Christian belief in God? Let thy voice be heard, then the doors of hell, the papal chair, as Christ says, cannot prevail against thee. Bestir thyself, Erasmus, that thou mayest overthrow Goliath, to become the man after God's own heart, as did David of old."

Thus thought Dürer, together with the whole of Germany. No less did the Catholic Church set her hopes on Erasmus in her deadly need, and Christ's representative on earth, the pope himself, wrote a letter couched in almost identical terms. "Step forth, step forth and support Christ's cause! Use your wonderful gifts to God's honour and glory. Bethink you that, with God's aid, you are capable of winning back most of those who have been led astray by Luther, setting their feet once more in the right path, of securing that all those who have not yet been seduced shall remain steadfast, and of persuading those who are about to stray to remain within the fold." The lord of Christendom and his bishops; the rulers of the world, Henry VIII of England, Charles V, Francis I of France, Ferdinand of Austria,



and the Duke of Burgundy, were on one side—while on the other, were the leaders of the Reformation, every one of them beseeching Erasmus, as during the Trojan war did Homeric princes outside the tent of the sulking Achilles, to bestir himself, to come out of his lethargy and enter the arena. The scene is majestically set. Seldom, indeed, have the mighty of the earth struggled for an utterance from one single individual, seldom has the supremacy of the mind been so victoriously manifested. But we have to realize the hidden cleavage in Erasmus's character. Never did he give these wooers who hung upon his every word a definite and heroic "I will not." He could not muster strength enough for an open, decisive, and unambiguous pronouncement. With neither party did he care to throw in his lot—and this, after all, does him credit, for it proves his spiritual independence. The unfortunate thing was, however, that he also did not wish to be in either party's bad graces, and that deprives his attitude of dignity. He dared not enter into open opposition with any of these persons of importance, all of whom were his benefactors or his admirers or his supporters, so he fobbed them off with evasions and divagations; he tried to side-track them, he temporized, he caracoled—how can one describe the unsatisfactoriness of his behaviour except by the use of some such words as these?—promising and hesitating, writing down binding words which failed to bind him, flattering and dissembling, excusing himself by saying he was sick, or tired, or explaining his reluctance by maintaining that he was incompetent to judge. To the pope he wrote with exaggerated modesty. How could he, so scantily furnished with intellectual endowments, he whose education had been so mediocre, how could he presume to undertake so enormous a task as the extirpation of heresy? The king of England was put off with some fresh excuse month after month, year after year; and Erasmus

resorted to the same methods in his dealings with Melanchthon and Zwingli, temporizing with them in flattering epistles. He knew hundreds of ways of wriggling out of his difficulty. And yet, behind this unpleasant façade of machinations there was hidden a resolute will. "If there be a man who cannot esteem Erasmus because he appears to be an unreliable Christian, let him think what he will of me. I cannot be other than I am. If Christ has endowed another with rarer mental powers, and this better-gifted person feels more sure of himself than I do, let him use these advantages to the better glory of the Lord. My reason tells me to take my way along a quieter and less dangerous road. I cannot help it if I hate discord and division, while loving peace and mutual understanding, for I have long since realized how dark and complicated are all human affairs. I know how much easier it is to incite to disorder than to damp down such disorder once it is let loose. And since I do not trust my own reason in all things, I prefer to step aside and not force myself to agree or to disagree with another man's mode of thought. My one wish is that all of us should unite to bring about the victory of the Christian cause and the triumph of that peace which is spoken of in the Gospels, to bring this about without violence, and by means of truth and reasonableness, so that in the end we shall understand one another perfectly, both as to priestly dignity and the freedom of the people whom our Lord Jesus Christ desired to see free. All those who, according to their capacities, will work towards this goal will have Erasmus as comrade in the fight. But if any should wish to drag me into the confusion, for him Erasmus will be neither a leader nor a companion."

His resolution was unshakable, and so he kept pope, emperor, kings, and reformers like Luther, Melanchthon, and Dürer, waiting year after year, and none



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of them was able ever to force from his lips the decisive word they expected. He smiled politely down upon his interlocutors, and his mouth remained sealed for ever.

But there was one man alive who refused to wait, an ardent and impatient warrior in the spirit's cause, resolute in his determination to cut the Gordian knot. This doughty knight was named Ulrich von Hutten, the "Knight who fought against Death and the Devil," the Archangel Michael of the German Reformation. He had looked up to Erasmus as to a father, trustingly and lovingly. Passionately devoted to humanistic ideas, the young man's most heartfelt desire was that he might become "the Alcibiades of this new Socrates"; he had laid his very life in Erasmus's hands, "in summa, if the gods vouchsafe it to me, and if you are long spared to be the honour of Germany, I am willing to leave all in order to be at your side." Erasmus, who was invariably susceptible to admiration, reciprocated by joyfully accepting this "peculiar lover of the Muses," for he delighted in the glowing youth of the man who had sung rapturously like a lark at heaven's gate, "*O saeculum, O litteræ! Juvat vivere!*" How confident is this exclamation, "It is a joy to be alive!" Erasmus had hoped to train the stripling to solid scholarship and to make of him a new master of the sciences. Soon, however, political activities had severed pupil from teacher; the airless rooms and the bookish knowledge of the humanists became too confined for Hutten. The young knight, son of a knight, drew the gauntlet on once more; he no longer wanted to wield the pen but a sword against pope and clerics. Although he had won his laureate's crown for Latin verse, he flung this foreign tongue aside in order that he might in the German vernacular summon his fellows to the fight for German evangelical teaching:



In Latin did I often write—  
 This was not known to everyone.  
 Now call I to my fatherland.

But Germany would not tolerate him and drove him forth; in Rome he barely escaped arrest and assassination. Banished from home and from court, a beggar and prematurely old, undermined in health by the "malady of France" (as syphilis was then called), covered with sores, with the last strength at his command he dragged himself to Basle. He was thirty-five years old. In Basle lived his great friend, the "Light of Germany," his teacher, his master, his protector: Erasmus. The young poet had helped to spread the sage's fame; the friendship of this scholar had accompanied him on his wanderings; letters of recommendation from Erasmus had opened many a door to him; indeed, he owed much of his facility for versification (now greatly reduced and half decayed) to Erasmus's guidance. So, in his ultimate necessity, just before the end, Hutten turned to his sometime friend.

And Erasmus? Never had his unfortunate anxiety of mind shown itself to such disadvantage as under this soul-shattering test. Erasmus refused to admit Hutten to his house. Already in Louvain Erasmus had found this "quarrelsome brawler" very hard to stomach; and when the poet had urged his master to declare war on the clergy, Erasmus had curtly declared: "My business is to further the cause of education." Now he felt no inclination to receive the fanatic who had sacrificed the Muse of poetry upon the altar of politics; he would have nothing to do with this "Pylades of a Luther"—anyway not openly, and especially not in this city where he was spied upon by hundreds of eyes. Erasmus was genuinely frightened by the advent of the unmercifully hunted, dying creature. He had three reasons for being afraid: first because of the man's physical condition, which was

appalling (Erasmus had invariably decamped whenever the plague was about in his neighbourhood, he having a phobia concerning infection); secondly, because he dreaded lest this *egens et omnibus rebus destitutus*, this beggar who had lost everything he possessed, might ask for shelter beneath Erasmus's roof and remain to be a pecuniary burden for the rest of his life; and, thirdly, because the fellow who had ventured to admonish the pope and had incited the German nation to take up arms against the priesthood might compromise the attitude of non-partisanship Erasmus had adopted. He turned Hutten from his door, not with a definite "I don't want you," but, following the dictates of his nature, with pettifogging excuses, such as that he could not on account of his stone trouble and his colics receive Hutten in a warmed room (an essential to the sorely afflicted poet) since stove-heating was quite unbearable to him—an obvious, a pitiful subterfuge.

A drama which put all spectators to the blush was now enacted. Basle, which was at that time a small town comprising no more than a hundred streets and two or three squares, where everyone knew his neighbours, witnessed the painful sight of Ulrich von Hutten, a knight, one of the champions of Luther, a famous poet, limping about its alleyways, slouching into beer-houses, passing again and again in front of the home where his former friend lived, his friend who had been the first to awaken him to the magnificence of the evangelical cause. Sometimes Hutten stood in the market-place looking with angry eyes at the locked door and the carefully shuttered windows of the man who had once named him "the new Lucian," and had proclaimed him to be the greatest satirical writer of the day. Like a snail in its shell, Erasmus sat huddled in the security of his house, an old and scraggy man, fuming with impatience for the departure of this disturber of the peace, "this burden-

some vagrant." Why does not the pestiferous fellow leave the city? Underground messages hastened to and fro, and still Hutten waited, still he hoped to see the door open, and the hand of his friend stretched forward to help him in his misery. But Erasmus kept silent, and though his conscience was uneasy, he lay hidden in his own house.

At length Hutten left, his poisoned body now harbouring within it a poisoned heart. He dragged himself to Zurich, where Zwingli gave him a welcome, helped him financially, and found him a quiet refuge on the little isle of Ufenau in Lake Zurich. Hutten was nearing his end and was kept most of the time ill in bed, until he died, and was laid to rest in the islet that had sheltered his frail and worn-out body. But ere he breathed his last this *Chevalier sans Peur et sans Reproche* once more raised his almost shattered sword in order, though only with the stump, to deal Erasmus a mortal blow, Erasmus the man of faith who was too cautious to proclaim his faith aloud. In a terrific indictment—*Expostulatio cum Erasmo*—he belaboured his former friend and leader. He depicted the pusillanimous scholar as an insatiable fame-hunter, as envious of the growing renown of another (a shrewd blow for Luther's camp), accused him of fickleness, poured ridicule upon his weaknesses, crying aloud so that the whole of Germany should hear the words: "Though Erasmus is in the bottom of his heart at one with the evangelical cause he has shamefully betrayed it." From the deathbed, Hutten summoned Erasmus before a world tribunal, to show his colours, to declare himself against the Reformation since he had not the courage to come forth as its advocate. Among the evangelicals Erasmus was no longer feared. "Gird yourself, the cause is ripe for action, and this would be a deed worthy of your advanced years. Gather all your energies and turn them into this work—you will find your



opponent fully armed. The Lutheran party, which you would fain wipe from the face of the earth, is awaiting the combat and will not fail to join battle." Knowing full well the cleavage in Erasmus's nature, Hutten told him frankly: "You will not be equal to such a fight as this, for your conscience warns you that on many points you agree with Luther. Part of you will not be able to attack us vigorously, because in reality you will have to attack your own earlier writings; you will be obliged to turn your knowledge against yourself, and eloquently to forswear your former eloquence. Your own books will have to fight against one another."

Erasmus knew at once that the blow had gone home. So far only insignificant scribblers had assaulted him. Time and again some peevish penman had drawn his attention to a mistranslation; and these petty wasp-stings had hurt his sensitive soul. Now he was being attacked by a doughtier foe, who battered him, and summoned him to declare himself before the whole German nation. In the first hours of alarm he endeavoured to suppress the manuscript which (in many copies) was circulating from hand to hand; but since this manœuvre proved unsuccessful, he wrathfully seized his pen and answered in his *Spongia adversus Aspergines Hutteni* (Sponge to wipe out Hutten's aspersions). He rendered blow for blow; nor, though he knew that Hutten was wounded unto death, did he shrink from hitting below the belt. In four hundred and twenty-four separate clauses, he nailed one accusation after another, and concluded with a magnificent and unambiguous confession of faith—for he was always great when his foundation, his independence, was assailed. "In many books, in many letters, in many disputations, I have unfalteringly declared that I refuse to mix myself in the affairs of any party whatsoever. When Hutten rails against me because I have not rallied to Luther's

support, as he himself would have me do, he fails to remember how three years ago I explicitly asserted that the Lutheran party was alien to my outlook and that it would always remain so; I even added that not only did I myself wish to keep out of it, but that I encouraged my friends to do likewise. I cannot change from this position. By the Lutheran party I mean the group of persons who whole-heartedly accept all that Luther has written or is writing or will write at some future date. Such abasement may be witnessed among even the most competent and worthy men; but for my part I have said frequently to my friends that if the Lutherans could feel kindly to me only on condition that I should agree unreservedly with their tenets, let them think what they will, I cannot do so. I love freedom, and I will not and cannot serve any party."

The vigorous counter-attack never touched Ulrich von Hutten. By the time it was printed and put into circulation the dauntless fighter had gone to his long rest where the gentle lapping of the waves lulled him in his lonely grave. Death had conquered Hutten before the mortal blow launched by Erasmus could reach him. But even in death, Hutten, the mighty defeated, gained one final victory. He achieved what neither emperor nor kings, what neither pope nor clergy with all the power of authority behind them, had been able to achieve; his biting sarcasms had drawn Erasmus from his lair. For, having publicly been held up to ridicule on account of his poltroonery and vacillation, Erasmus was forced to demonstrate that he was not afraid of a scuffle with the greatest of his antagonists, with Luther himself. He had now to "show his colours," he had now to take a side. It was with a heavy heart that Erasmus set to work. He was an old man who desired nothing more from life

than peace and tranquillity. Nor was he deceived as to the position in respect of Luther's cause; he knew that it had long since become too powerful to be shuffled out of existence with a stroke of the pen. He knew that no one would be convinced by his eloquence, that he could change nothing, and better nothing. Lacking pleasure in, lacking any desire for the undertaking, he entered the battle which had been thrust upon him. He could not draw back now. And when his work against Luther was at length, in 1524, handed over to the printer, he sighed, relieved at heart: "*Facta alea est*" (the die is cast).



## Chapter 9

### SETTLEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

LITERARY gossip is not peculiar to one epoch; it is with us always. Even in the sixteenth century, when men of learning were but thinly strewn over the land, nothing could be kept secret from these inquisitives. Before Erasmus had taken his pen in hand, before even he was certain that he would enter the fray, they knew in Wittenberg what had been planned in Basle. Luther was counting upon the attack. "Truth is mightier than eloquence," he had written to a friend in 1522, "and faith is greater than erudition. I shall never issue a challenge to Erasmus, nor do I intend, should he attack me, immediately to defend myself. I should prefer, indeed, that he should not shoot the bolts of his eloquence at me . . . if, nevertheless, he should venture to do so he will learn that Christ fears neither the portals of hell nor the powers of the air. I shall pick up the famous Erasmus's gauntlet and shall give battle without any consideration as to his reputation, his name or his standing."

This letter, which Luther obviously wished to have communicated to Erasmus, was a threat, or at least a warning. Behind the bluff words one cannot but feel that at bottom Luther would have preferred to avoid a clash of pens, seeing the critical moment he was then traversing. In both camps, therefore, friends of the belligerents took a hand in the game, hoping to act as mediators. Melanchthon and Zwingli both endeavoured, in the good cause of evangelical teaching, to bring about a reconciliation between Basle and Wittenberg; and at

the outset their intermediation seemed most promising. Then, unexpectedly, Luther made up his mind to address Erasmus personally.

But how greatly had his tone changed since, a few years earlier, Luther had written to "the great man" in polite, nay over-polite, terms, in the spirit of a pupil towards a master. He now realized that a historic hour was about to chime, he likewise had become fully aware what his mission was to be, and his words, therefore, had a passionate clangour. What was one foe more or less to Luther, who was at war with pope and emperor, indeed with all the powers of the earth? He was sick of secret machinations. He refused to form a pact with uncertainty and lukewarmness. "I will have neither part nor lot with vague and faltering words or speeches." Luther wanted clarity. For the last time he held a hand out to Erasmus, making an offer of reconciliation—but the hand was already wearing an iron gauntlet.

The opening words of this missive are polite and restrained. "I have been sitting quiet long enough, my dear Herr Erasmus, and though I have been waiting for you, as the greater man and the elder of us twain, to make the first move to break the silence between us, yet after so long a wait, my love urges me to make a beginning myself, by writing to you. I have no objections to make in regard to your dealings with the pope, if you yourself are satisfied. . . ." Then, in mighty and always disdainful words, the writer's ill-humour against the shilly-shallier breaks forth: "For since it is obvious that the Lord has not yet endowed you with such constancy, such courage, and such sense, as should lead you to fight against this monster boldly, shoulder to shoulder with us, I would not expect of you what is too much for my own strength. . . . I should, however, have preferred it had you thought fit to refrain from devoting your gifts to mingling in our affairs; for although, with your stand-

ing and your eloquence, you might achieve much, yet it would be better, since your heart is not with us, for you to serve God only with the talent He confided to your safe keeping." He goes on to regret Erasmus's weaknesses and aloofness; then, in the end, he hurls forth the decisive word, crying that the importance of the matter had now far overreached Erasmus's goal, that it would not endanger him (Luther) if Erasmus should put his whole weight in the balance against the Lutheran cause, and still less could an occasional sneer or gibe do any hurt. Arrogantly and almost dictatorially, he challenged Erasmus to forbear the use of "biting, rhetorical, and flowery language," and, above all, if he could do nothing else, to remain "an onlooker upon the tragedy" and not to encourage the other side. Erasmus was not to attack Luther in writings, and Luther for his part would refrain from taking up his pen against Erasmus. "There has been enough biting; we must now see to it that we do not tear one another to pieces and destroy each other."

Such high-handed letters had never come Erasmus's way. The prince of the humanistic realm, despite his serenity of mind, could not endure that the man who had of yore addressed him so humbly, asking for protection, should now challenge him so derogatorily, treating him as a babbler of no importance. So he answered proudly: "I have worked better on behalf of evangelical teaching than many who now plume themselves upon their knowledge of the Gospels. I see, also, that this Reformation has brought into being many corrupt and insurrectionary men, and I see that the apostles of humane letters are prone to walk backwards like a crab, that friendships are being broken, and I fear lest a bloodstained revolt may occur. I shall never admit that the evangel shall be sacrificed on the altar of human passion." He emphasized the fact that had he chosen to come forth against



## SETTLEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

Luther he would have gained the thanks and approbation of the mighty. But perhaps one did better service to the cause of the Gospels by entering the field against Luther than did those fools who so loudly clamoured in his name and on account of whom it was impossible to remain merely an onlooker at the tragedy. Luther's uncompromising attitude had hardened Erasmus's wavering will. "Ah, that it may not end in tragedy," he moaned in vague anticipation. Then he took up his pen, his only weapon, once again.

Erasmus knew very well that his opponent was a Titan; at the bottom of his heart, he may also have realized Luther's superiority as a fighter, and the vigour of his rages against which no opposition seemed able to prevail. But Erasmus's strength lay in the fact that he knew his own limitations, and this is very rare in a man of artistic temperament. He knew that an intellectual tourney was being played before the eyes of the whole world, and that the theologists and the humanists of Europe were eagerly awaiting the issue of the jousts. It was necessary, therefore, to occupy an impregnable position, and Erasmus chose one with masterly cunning. He did not run atilt against Luther head down, blindly hoping to unsaddle him, but sought with the eye of a hawk for vulnerable points in Lutheran teaching, choosing, apparently, a side issue, though it was in reality the very core of Luther's doctrinal edifice—which was still wobbly upon its foundations, and as yet far from being complete. Even Luther was forced "to praise and to extol" this selection: "You among all my opponents have seized upon the kernel of the matter; you are the one and only man who has beheld the vital nerve of the subject at issue, and who has in this struggle taken the matter by the throat." With his amazing power of pene-

tration, Erasmus selected in this hand-to-hand encounter, not the firm foothold of conviction, but, rather the slippery dialectical ground of a question in theology upon which the iron-fisted opponent was unable to strike him to earth, and in which he knew that he would have the invisible backing and protection of the philosophers of every epoch.

The problem selected by Erasmus as the basis of discussion has been a bone of contention among theologians down the ages: the question of the freedom or the non-freedom of the human will. Luther, following the traditional Augustinian teaching of predestination, maintained that man remained forever God's captive. He possesses not an iota of free will; every action he performs is known by God beforehand and is traced out by divine ordinance. By no good works, by no *bona opera*, by no contrition is man able to put his own will in motion, to liberate himself from the entanglement caused by antecedent sin; God's grace alone is competent to lead man along the right path. In modern phraseology we should say: our individual destiny is governed entirely by the massive bulk of our heredity, by concatenations of circumstance which no personal will can control in so far as God does not will it. As Goethe says:

... Volition

Is naught but willing what we have to will.

Naturally a humanist who believed in the human reason as a sacred and God-given power, could not accept such a doctrine. Erasmus was unshaken in his belief that not only individual men but the whole of mankind could, by an upright and disciplined exertion of the will, be raised to a higher level of morality; so that to him such a stark and almost Mohammedan fatalism must have been profoundly uncongenial. But Erasmus would



not have been Erasmus if he had uttered a frank and downright No to the opinions of a rival. Here as elsewhere he shrank from extremes, and could not see his way to accepting Luther's curt and uncompromisingly determinist outlook. He himself admitted, in his cautious and vacillating way, that he took "no pleasure in definite assertions"; his inclination was towards doubt; and he gladly submitted in such cases to the words of the Scriptures and of Mother Church. In Holy Writ, ideas were often expressed in an obscure way and were not thoroughly explained. On this account he felt that it was dangerous to declare as resolutely as did Luther that there was no such thing as free will. He did not say that Luther's concept was wholly false, but he objected to the adoption of so uncompromising an attitude as was expressed in the phrase *non nihil*; he refused to accept the contention that all the good works a man performs can make no impression on God and are, therefore, superfluous. If, as Luther did, one attributed everything to God's grace, what sense was there in men trying to do good? One should (again we hear the man who ever has a foot in both camps) at least leave the illusion of free will to man, so that he sink not into despair, and so that God may not seem to him cruel and unjust. "I agree with those who attribute certain things to free will and the majority of things to the grace of God, for we must not in this matter avoid the Scylla of pride and thereby fall upon the Charybdis of fatalism."

Even when the battle was joined, Erasmus, the peacemaker, went a long way to meet his opponent. He took occasion to warn his contemporaries not to place too great importance upon such discussions, but, rather, "to ask themselves if it is right to set the whole world in a conflagration for the sake of a few paradoxical conceptions." If only Luther would yield but the fraction of an inch, would but take one step to meet him, this intellectual



squabble would end in peace and harmony. But could Erasmus hope for compromise from the most iron-minded man of that century, from a man who in matters of belief and conviction would not, even if tied to the stake, sacrifice a jot or tittle of his principles, who, born fanatic that he was, would prefer death or the destruction of the world to giving up the tiniest and most indifferent paragraph of his doctrines?

Luther did not answer Erasmus at once, although this man of wrath and violence was irritated in the extreme by the attack. "While I cared not a rap for and did not even trouble to peruse the other books in which I have been taken to task, I read the Erasmian document, but all the time I was reading I felt inclined to fling the thing into the fire," he exclaimed roughly, after his customary fashion. But during the year 1524 weightier and more important affairs pressed upon him, matters of far greater urgency than a theological discussion. The fate of every revolutionary is that he who wishes to replace the old order by the new has to let loose the forces of chaos, and he risks being outstripped by others yet more radical than he, who will make confusion worse confounded. Luther had demanded freedom of speech and religion; now his followers began making demands on their own account: the Zwickau prophets, Karlstadt, Münzer, "all these gushers," as Luther called them, had rallied under the banner of evangelical reform to defy the emperor and the realm. Luther's own words against the nobles and the princes were converted by these allies into pikes and caltrops; what he had intended to be a religious and spiritual revolution was, in the hands of an oppressed peasantry, becoming a social and communist insurrection. During these trying days, the spiritual tragedy of Erasmus was

repeated with Luther; world-shaking events he had never desired came to pass because of his words, and just as he had reproached Erasmus for being a Laodicean so now did the folk of the *Bundschuh*, the cloister-stormers, and the image-breakers reprove him for being "a new-fangled papistical sophist," the "friend of Antichrist," and "the uppish flesh of Wittenberg." Erasmus's fate! What he had meant to be taken in a spiritual sense, was interpreted literally by the masses and their fanatical leaders, so that, as he said, his words became "fleshly," and took on a crude agitational colour. The same fate befalls every revolution; one wave succeeds another. If Erasmus may be likened to the Girondins, then Luther may be compared with the Jacobins, and Thomas Münzer and his followers with the ultra-Jacobins such as Marat. He, who had hitherto been undisputed leader, was suddenly to carry on the fight along two fronts simultaneously, against the lukewarm and against the wild men of the woods; he must bear full responsibility for the social revolution, for the most horrible and most bloodstained insurrection Germany had experienced for centuries. It was his name that was inscribed in the heart of the commonalty; his incendiary action against emperor and empire which gave these minor incendiaries the pluck to rise against their counts and lieges. "We are harvesting the fruit of your mind," Erasmus could call to him, and the reproach was fully justified. "You refuse to acknowledge your acquaintance with the rebels, but they recognize you well enough. You can do nothing to prevent public opinion from ascribing present events to the influence of your books, especially those written in the German tongue."

Luther was faced with a terrible dilemma: was he, whose roots went deep into the folk-life and whose own existence linked him so intimately with the peasantry which he had summoned to revolt against the princes,

now to repudiate those who were fighting along the path he had pointed out, those who, at his summons, and in the name of evangelical freedom, had become disloyal to the princes? For the first time in his life (his situation having suddenly changed to something extraordinarily similar to that of Erasmus) Luther endeavoured to deal with the crisis "Erasmianly." He warned the princes to exercise moderation, he warned the peasantry not "to bring disgrace upon the name of Christianity by deeds of violence, by impatience, and unchristianly behaviour." But—and this was a terrible blow to a man equipped with Luther's colossal self-confidence—the common people no longer hearkened to his voice, but, rather, to those who promised them most, to Thomas Münzer and the communistic theologians. In the end he was forced to a decision, for the unbridled upheaval threatened to compromise his work; and he realized that the internecine struggle would hamper his own spiritual fight against the papacy. "If these murderous spirits had not drawn the peasants into their nets, things would now have been otherwise with the papacy." When his work and his mission were at stake Luther never hesitated. Himself a revolutionary, he had nevertheless to take his stand against the peasant revolution; and when Luther took sides he could only do so as an extremist, in the wildest, most biased, most ferocious way imaginable. Among all his writings, the one which was the child of this hour of danger, his pamphlet against the German peasantry, is the most bloodthirsty and terrific. "Those who rally to the side of the princes will become holy martyrs; those who fail, will go to the devil; therefore let all who can, both in public and in private, strike down and strangle these miscreants—bearing ever in mind that there is nothing more poisonous, more noisome, more devilish than a man who incites the people to insurrection." Without stopping to consider, he ranged himself



with authority and against the people. "The donkey needs a thrashing, and the brute populace must be governed by brute force." Not a word did this berserker find to say on behalf of clemency when the conquering knighthood suppressed the peasant revolt with abominable ruthlessness; he had no pity for the innumerable victims, for in his wrath he knew no measure; not a syllable would he utter on behalf of the thousands who had put their trust in him, and who had been initiated by him into the art of insurrection against their overlords. In the end he acknowledged with a grim courage, when the fields of Wurtemberg were running with blood: "I, Martin Luther, have slain all the peasants who died during this rebellion, for I goaded authority to the slaughter. Their blood be on my head."

This "furor," this tremendous power for hating, still whetted his quill when he turned it against Erasmus in his reply. He might have forgiven his rival's theological excursus, but the enthusiastic welcome given to it in the wide realm of humanistic culture fanned the flames of his wrath till it became raving madness. Luther winced at the notion that his enemies were intoning a song of triumph. "Tell me, where is the doughty Maccabæus, where is he who is so sure of his teaching?" Now that the peasant trouble lay behind him, he would not only answer Erasmus, but crush him out of existence. While at board with some friends he made known his intention in the awesome announcement: "I conjure you, therefore, at God's command, to become Erasmus's vowed foes and that you have naught to do with his books. I shall write all I have it in mind to say no matter if he dies of it and rots. I intend to kill Satan with my pen." To which he added, not without a tincture of pride: "Just as I slew Münzer, whose blood is on my head."

But even in his rages and precisely when his blood was at boiling point, Luther, as artist and man of genius, was never false to the German language. He knew how formidable was his antagonist, and, conscious of this, his work took on the proportions of greatness. It was a book on the grand scale, going to the root of things, of a wide compass, sparkling with images, glowing with passion, a book which, in addition to its vast erudition, displays more magnificently than any of his other works his imaginative and human powers. *De servo arbitrio* (a treatise upon the servitude of the will) is one of the greatest compositions in the realm of controversial literature that this firebrand ever wrote. Thanks to it, the settlement of accounts with Erasmus has become one of the most significant discussions ever engaged in by two men of utterly opposing temperaments. No matter how far from our present interests the subject may now appear, because of the magnitude of the parties ranged against one another it has become one of the greatest achievements in the whole domain of literature.

Before Luther entered the lists, before buckling his harness and pulling down his visor, before taking spear in hand for a murderous thrust, he raised for a moment, but only for a brief moment, his weapon in courtly salutation. "I give you honour and praise such as I have never given you before." He recognized straightforwardly that Erasmus had dealt with him "gently and with consideration," and had been the only one to touch the nerve of the whole issue. But no sooner was the salute made than he clenched his fist resolutely, became rude, and was immediately in his own proper element. He answered Erasmus, so he said, because St. Paul had commanded that "vain talkers must have their mouths stopped." Blow followed upon blow. With magnificent,



truly Luther-like imagery, he hammered away at Erasmus with all his might, reproaching him for that he was always walking on eggs, never wishing to crush one, was always stepping between glasses and never touching one. Mockingly he declared: "Erasmus refuses to stand his ground on any issue, and yet he maintains such a judgment concerning us—that is as good as running to avoid a slight shower and tumbling into a pond." At a stroke he revealed the contrast between Erasmus's stealthy prudence and his own unambiguous directness and certitude. The former deemed bodily freedom, comfort, and peace higher assets than belief, whereas he himself was ready to believe even though the whole world should be filled with unrest and should sink into decay and ruin. Since Erasmus in his attack warned him to be cautious and quoted certain ambiguities in the biblical texts, dubious points which no mortal should venture to interpret with absolute confidence and self-assuredness, Luther yelled: "Without certitude, Christianity cannot exist. A Christian must be sure of his doctrine and his cause, or he is no Christian." He who hesitates, is lukewarm, or filled with doubts, should once and for all leave theology alone. "The Holy Ghost is not a sceptic," he thundered forth in another place. "He has not inspired our hearts with some vague illusion, but has planted a strong certainty there." Obstinate, Luther clings to his outlook that man can only be good if he carries God in his heart, and he is bad when the Devil rides on his back; his own will remains unsubstantial, and is powerless against the inevitable and immutable prevision of God. Gradually, out of the single problem, out of this single issue, a far greater contrast arose. Like a parting of the waters, and in accordance with their temperaments, there emerged the conviction that these two renovators of religion had totally different conceptions of Christ's essence and being. For Erasmus, the humanist, Christ was the messenger of everything



human, the divine being who had given His blood in order that the shedding of blood might disappear from the world, together with discord and quarrelsomeness. Luther, however, God's lansquenet, insisted on the literal rendering of the text "I come not to send peace, but a sword." He who wishes to be a true Christian, says Erasmus, must live peacefully and act with forbearance in the spirit of the Lord Jesus. To which the inflexible Luther responded that the true Christian must never yield an inch of his ground so far as God's word is concerned even if the world should have to come to an end through such tenacity. Years before, he had written to Spalatinus: "I do not think that the cause can be carried to a successful issue without tumult, vexation, and insurrection. You cannot make a quill-pen out of a sword, nor change war into peace. God's word is war and vexation and destruction, it is poison. Like a bear in the path, like a lioness in the jungle, it attacks the sons of Ephraim." Quickly hurling Erasmus's summons to unity and understanding in his rival's teeth, Luther continued: "Let be with your complaining and clamour; against such a fever no medicines can prevail. This war is our Lord God's war. He has unchained it, and never will it cease raging until all the enemies of His word have been wiped from the face of the earth." Erasmus's gentle and conciliatory ways "show a lack of true Christian faith"; it is, therefore, better that he stand aside and busy himself with meritorious labours, such as translating Latin and Greek texts into good German; he should amuse himself with his humanistic trifling, and should desist from meddling with problems which can only be elucidated by the inner certitude of a believing, of a completely believing, mortal. Dictatorially, Erasmus was ordered once and for all to refrain from intervening in the religious struggle which by now had become a matter of world-wide importance: "God has not blessed you with strength sufficient to be

of use to the cause, nor did He wish you to have such powers." He, Luther, however, felt the call, and thus his conscience gave him a sense of certainty: "What or who I am, and for what purpose and in what spirit I have become mixed in this fight I leave to God who knows all; that which I perform was not initiated through my will but through His divine and free will, and it is through Him that I have accomplished the tasks under my hand."

Thus was the issue between the humanists and the reformers settled. The Erasmian spirit and the Lutheran, reason versus passion, a religion of humanity as against a fanatical belief, supranationality and nationality, versatility and one-sidedness, flexibility and rigidity, all these disparate things were and are as little able to combine as fire and water. Whenever they encounter one another here below, they engender rage and wrath, setting up one element to fight the other.

Luther never forgave Erasmus the public attack the latter had made upon him. This combative man could not brook any other end to a fight than that his adversary be completely overthrown. Whereas Erasmus, once having said his say—as in *Hyperaspistes*, which for a person of his soft and yielding disposition was a fairly violent piece of writing—was content to return to his studies, Luther's hate continued to glow and increase in intensity. He never missed an opportunity for hurling insults at the man who had had the audacity to differ from him on one single point; and, in his "murderous hatred" (as Erasmus called it), he did not recoil from vilification and actual calumny. "He who crushes Erasmus, cracks a bug which stinks even worse when dead than when alive." He named the scholar of Rotterdam "the vilest of Christ's foes"; and when he was shown a portrait of

Erasmus he said warningly to his friends: "This is the face of a wily and malignant man who has made mock both of God and of religion . . . who, night and day, excogitates some freshly evasive term; and if ever one fancies he has said something vital one finds on examination that he has said nothing at all." At table he apostrophized the friends assembled over meat, exclaiming furiously: "I take you all as witnesses for what I am about to declare. In my testament I mean to declare plainly that I hold Erasmus to be the greatest enemy of Christ, such an enemy as does not appear more than once in a thousand years." Moreover he did not shrink from blasphemy: "When I pray, 'Blessed be Thy holy name,' I curse Erasmus and his heretical congeners who revile and profane God."

Nevertheless, though Luther was the man of wrath personified, though in battle his eyes became bloodshot, he was not always at war, but had, on account of his doctrine and its influence, at times to exercise the arts of diplomacy. Maybe his friends drew his attention to the fact that it was unwise to bespatter the old man with such intolerable abuse, seeing that Erasmus was esteemed and honoured throughout the length and breadth of Europe. Anyway after a year of terrific diatribes against this "greatest enemy of God," Luther laid the sword aside and took an olive branch in hand, writing an almost jovial letter wherein he excused himself for having "dealt such hard blows." This time it was Erasmus who curtly refused to be conciliated. "I am not so childish that, after having all imaginable abuse hurled at me, I can be won over by jokes and flattery. . . . To what purpose were all those mockeries and those degrading lies, the accusations of my being an atheist, a sceptic in matters of faith, a blasphemer, and I know not what besides? . . . That which has passed between us is not important, least of all to me who am nearing my end. But what, to every



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man who respects himself and to me personally, gives cause for vexation is that, by your immoderate, shameless, and instigatory behaviour, you have disturbed the whole world; . . . and that, through your will, this storm cannot come to the good end for which I have fought. . . . Our dispute is a private matter; but my heart is sorely grieved at the widespread suffering and the incurable confusion for which we have no one to thank but yourself, with your unbridled ways, and the impossibility of getting you to follow good counsel. . . . I could have wished you to possess another kind of mentality than the one you possess, the one you admire so greatly. You may wish me anything you like with the exception of this mentality of yours. May the Lord intervene to change it!"

Thus, with a harshness quite foreign to his nature, Erasmus rejected Luther's peace overtures, refused to shake the hand which had laid his universe to waste. He refused to know Luther or to greet Luther any more, for the peace of the Church had been destroyed by this violent man who had provoked the most appalling *tumultus* of the spirit, and had let slip the dogs of war in Germany and the entire world.

But tumult raged throughout the lands, and no one could evade it, not even Erasmus. Unrest became the law of the day, and fate decreed that whenever Erasmus longed for rest the world rose against him to prevent it. Basle, the town to which he had fled because of its neutrality, was gripped in the fever of the Reformation. The mob stormed churches, tore down pictures from the altars and statues from their niches, and burned the lot in three separate heaps in the minster square. Erasmus saw his perennial enemy, fanaticism, raging round his home with firebrand and sword. One small consolation remained to him that in the course of the

tumult no blood was shed. "Would that it could always be thus!"

Now that Basle had taken a firm stand in favour of the Reformation and had espoused one side of the dispute to the exclusion of the other, it was no longer the asylum Erasmus needed for his peace of mind. He felt that he could not remain within its walls. At sixty years of age, Erasmus transferred his home to the quiet little town of Freiberg-im-Breisgau (then Austrian), so that he might carry on his work in tranquillity. He was met by a solemn procession of burghers and officials, who presented him with a veritable palace as place of habitation. He declined this magnificent offer, preferring to instal himself in more modest quarters next door to the monastery, where he hoped to continue his studies and end his days in peace and quiet. History could have furnished no better symbol for a man who kept to the golden mean, who was on intimate terms with no one because he was incapable of taking sides: Erasmus was forced to leave Louvain because it was too Catholic; he was forced to leave Basle because it was too Protestant. A free and independent mind, which refuses to be bound by any dogma and declines to join any party, never finds a home upon this earth.

## Chapter 10

### THE END

ERASMUS was sixty years of age; he was weary and worn out. Once again, this time in Freiburg, he sat behind his books, a fugitive—how many times before had he played the same rôle?—a fugitive from the rush and turmoil of the world. His delicate frame seemed to shrink in size as the years sped by, his sensitive face with its network of wrinkles and folds came increasingly to resemble a parchment inscribed with mystic runes and ciphers. He who had so implicitly believed in the possibility of a resurrection and renovation of man and his world by the workings of the spirit and the mind, grew bitterer, more mocking, and more ironical in his attitude to the world without. Peevish and crabbed of temper like all confirmed bachelors, he complained ceaselessly of the decay of scientific culture, lamented that his foes had such reserves of hate to draw upon, grumbled about the costliness of living and bemoaned the trickiness of bankers, was querulous concerning the quality of the wines he drank. Increasingly disappointed, Erasmus withdrew from a world estranged, a world which refused to keep the peace, a world which had slain reason by means of passion, and justice by means of violence. His heart was drowsy, but his hand was as vigorous as ever, his mind as keen and bright as a lamp shedding immaculate rays in a wide circle about it, and penetrating to the remotest corners of the field of vision his incorruptible intelligence surveyed. One friend alone, his oldest, best, and trustworthiest friend, shared study and writing-table



with him: Dame Work. Each day he wrote thirty to forty letters, he filled folio after folio of translations from the Fathers, he added to his *Colloquia*, and composed innumerable works dealing with morals and æsthetics. He wrote and wrought with the consciousness of a man who believed in the right and the duty of reason, and who had set himself the task of announcing its undying truth to a thankless world. But in his heart of hearts he knew that it was useless to issue a summons to a higher humanity in troublous times, when men had gone mad; he realized that his sublime idea of humanism was a pricked bubble. Everything he had longed for, had fought for—mutual understanding and kindly conciliation in the place of savage warfare—had been shipwrecked upon the shoals of zealotry and stubbornness; his spiritual realm, his Platonic State which was to have been established in the midst of the earthly world about him, his republic of scholars, all this could find no place on the battlefields where the parties and factions were fighting. Between Germany and France and Italy and Spain, campaigns were ceaselessly carried on, and vast armies like wandering thunderstorms ravaged across these unhappy lands; Christ's name had become a war-cry and a standard around which forgathered the military activity of the day. How absurd to go on writing tracts and beseeching the princes to come to their senses, how unreasonable to continue being the advocate of evangelical teachings since God's representative and messenger had taken the word "Evangel" to serve as a bone of contention. "These words 'Evangel,' 'God's truth,' 'faith,' 'Christ,' 'spirit,' are perpetually spilling from their mouths, and yet I see many of them so conducting themselves as if they were possessed of the devil." No, it was most decidedly a waste of time and trouble to try, in an epoch of political turmoil, to act as mediator and to compose differences. The exalted dream of a

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spiritually-united, humanistic Europe had come to an end; and he who had dreamed this dream, Erasmus, now a tired old man, was no longer of any use, for no one hearkened to his message. The world of men passed him by; he was not needed any more.

Nevertheless, before a candle goes out it flutters up into a sturdy flame ere it dies. Before an idea can be quenched in the storms of an epoch, it has one last flicker of energy. Thus it was with Erasmus. Short-lived but magnificent the Erasmian thought, the idea of reconciliation and conciliation, flamed anew. Charles V, ruler of two worlds, came to a momentous decision. He was no longer the timid boy he had been at the time of his coronation and at the Diet of Worms. Disappointment and experience had schooled and matured him, and the splendid victory he had just achieved over France provided him with what he lacked in the way of self-confidence and authority. On his return to Germany after the campaign, he resolved to put order into the religious chaos, to reinstate the unity of the Church so wantonly destroyed by Luther, and to do so even if he had to resort to force. But before using force he determined to set about the task in the Erasmian way, by endeavouring to bring the contending parties to an agreement, to create a *modus vivendi* between the old-established Church and the new ideas, to "summon a council of wise and unprejudiced men," so that they might in Christian love and charity listen to every argument, and select those points which could serve as foundation for a united and renewed Christian Church. With this goal in view, the Emperor Charles V called the Diet of Augsburg.

The Diet of Augsburg proved to be one of the most momentous events in the history of the German people,

and, indeed, in the history of the world; one of those events that can never recur and which are pregnant with possibilities for the coming centuries. To outward appearance, the Diet of Augsburg was less dramatic than that held at Worms some years previously, but it certainly did not lag behind the earlier one so far as its lasting historical importance was concerned. Now, as then, the point at issue was the spiritual and intellectual unity of the western world.

At the outset, the Diet of Augsburg was extraordinarily favourable to the Erasmian idea, that of a conciliatory discussion between the opponents. Both parties to the dispute, the old Church and the new, were going through a severe crisis, and were, therefore, ripe for an understanding. The Catholic Church had lost much of its whilom arrogance, and no longer looked disdainfully down upon "the insignificant German heretic," for she realized that the Reformation movement had kindled a blaze throughout northern Europe, a conflagration which was spreading further and further over the land. The Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, Denmark, and (this was the cruellest blow) England had gone over to the new doctrines; everywhere the penurious rulers were realizing how conveniently they could fill their treasuries by closing down the religious establishments and confiscating ecclesiastical possessions in the name of Holy Writ. The ancient weapons of Mother Church, excommunication, exorcism, and the like, did not impose upon people now as in the days of Canossa, for had not an Augustinian monk of no importance defied the papal ban and burned the bull cheerfully in a public bonfire? But where the papacy had suffered most was in its self-esteem; wounded to the heart it had to contemplate its ravaged estates from the heights of the Holy See. The *sacco di Roma* had ruined the prestige of the curia for decades to come.



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Luther, too, and his followers had gone through much trial and tribulation since the exciting and heroic days at Worms. In the evangelical camp, likewise, "the loving concord of the Church" had been rent and torn. Ere Luther had been given time to organize a compact congregation of the faithful, rivals had entered the field. There were Zwingli and Karlstadt and Henry VIII and the sects of the zealots and the Anabaptists to contend with. This fanatical believer had come to realize that what he desired to establish on the spiritual plane was being interpreted in a material sense, was being exploited for utilitarian purposes and for personal advantage. Gustav Freytag has given apt expression to the tragedy which brooded over Luther's life in later years. "He who is destined to create the greatest thing imaginable, has at one and the same time to tear into shreds a part of his own life. The more conscientiously he sets himself to the task, the more acutely does he feel within his own heart the cleavage he has brought into the ordering of the world. This is the hidden wound, aye the feeling of compunction, which invariably accompanies every world-shaking thought." For the first time, this hard and irreconcilable creature showed an inclination towards understanding; his followers, too, were more cautious since they observed that their overlord and emperor, Charles V, had freed his arms and was ready once again to wield his trusty blade. Many of them were thinking that it might be advisable not to stand as rebels before their liege lord who was also the master of Europe. One's lands and one's head might easily pay the forfeit for any sign of opposition.

At length the terrible obstinacy of both sides was undermined, that inflexible and unyielding stubbornness which characterized the fight in Germany before and after the Diet of Augsburg was broken. Should a reconciliation in the Erasmian spirit be brought about,

should the old Church and the new come to an agreement, then Germany and indeed the whole world would once again be united, and the period of religious warfare and of civil strife could be ended for ever. The moral overlordship of Germany would be securely established, and the disgraceful religious persecutions would cease. No longer would people be burned at the stake on account of their opinions; the Index and the Inquisition need no longer set their baleful stigma upon the freedom of mind; and Europe would henceforward be spared immeasurable wretchedness. The opponents were separated by such a small bridge now. Would they cross it? Just a little give and take on both sides, and reason, humanism, the Erasmian concept, would gain the day.

A promising sign in the encounter was that this time the evangelical cause was not in Luther's ruthless hands but was to be pleaded by the more diplomatic Melanchthon. This extraordinarily gentle and noble-minded man, honoured by the Protestant Church as the truest friend and assistant Luther ever had, remained all his life the faithful disciple of Erasmus. His whole nature, his attitude of mind throughout the conflict, made him sympathetic to the humanistic and humane ideas of Luther's most formidable opponent, and his concept of evangelical teaching ran better in harness with Erasmus's than with the less malleable and severe formula of Luther. But nevertheless Luther's personality and strength worked suggestively upon Melanchthon. In Wittenberg, in Luther's immediate neighbourhood, Melanchthon felt himself completely subservient to Luther's will; he served the master humbly and with all the zeal his clear-thinking and organizing mind was capable of. In Augsburg, however, away from the hypnotic influence of the master, the other side, the Erasmian side of Melanchthon's nature could be given free play. During the Diet at Augsburg he went out of



his way to be conciliatory, going so far in his concessions that his feet almost led him back into the fold of the Roman communion. He himself was responsible for the "Augsburg Confession." Luther could never "have trod so softly and gently." This document, in spite of its unambiguous and artistic phraseology, was in no way provocative and could not wound the pride of the Catholic Church. During the discussions, too, many highly controversial points were passed over in silence. Thus, the doctrine of predestination, about which Luther and Erasmus had fought so bitterly, was not referred to, nor was the thorny problem of the divine right of the papacy mentioned, nor the "character indelebilis," the inalienable quality of priesthood, nor the seven sacraments. From either side, conciliatory words were spoken. Melancthon wrote: "We respect the authority of the pope and the Church so long as the pope of Rome refrains from casting us out." A representative of the Vatican, on the other hand, made a semi-official declaration that such questions as the celibacy of the clergy and lay communion in both kinds were "discutable." The assembly, in spite of untold difficulties, was beginning to hope; and if a man of high moral authority, a man possessing a profound and passionate will to peace, had been at hand to put his whole weight, his full eloquence, all the logic at his command, into the scale on the side of reconciliation, who knows but that at the eleventh hour Protestants and Catholics, the parties with both of which he was closely associated (the former by sympathy and the latter by fidelity), might have been brought to a unity which would have saved the ideal of a united European Christendom?

The only man then living who might have brought this miracle to pass was Erasmus, and Emperor Charles V, the ruler of two worlds, had sent him a special invitation to be present at the Diet, conjuring him to give



advice and to act as mediator. But Erasmus's tragical destiny recapitulated itself. Again, as so often before, he missed a magnificent and unique opportunity because of over-cautiousness, because of his innate weakness and his incapacity for coming to a definite conclusion. What had happened at the Diet of Worms happened again now. Erasmus failed to put in an appearance. He could not bring himself to stand firm on a vital issue, to risk his person for his faith. Granted, he wrote letters, many letters to both parties, very shrewd, very human, very convincing letters; he sought out his friends in both camps, Melanchthon in one and the papal representative in the other, beseeching them to shed their extremer differences and meet half-way. But the written word has never, in times of tension and doom, the strength of warm and living speech, the vocal call to arms. Luther, too, sent message after message from his retreat in Coburg, endeavouring to render Melanchthon stiffer than he was by nature and inclination. In the end, the contrasts became acute once more because the right man, the man of genial and conciliatory habit, was lacking. Discussion followed upon discussion and the idea of conciliation was ground between the upper and the nether millstones of the old and the new Churches. The Diet of Augsburg rent Christendom in twain, and yet it had been summoned with a view to bringing the parties together in a spirit of concord. Henceforward there were to be two faiths, and instead of peace the world knew only strife. Luther harshly drew his conclusions: "If war comes of it, very well then, war will come; but we have done all we could to avoid it." And Erasmus tragically observed: "If a terrible confusion floods our world, remember that Erasmus foretold its advent."

From those momentous days onward, the Erasmian

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idea was dead. The old man behind his barricade of books in Freiburg was nothing but a useless bag of bones, and enjoyed the merest shadow of his former fame. He himself considered it to be better for a man who felt at home only in the realm of calm forbearance to withdraw from "this noisy, or, better said, crazy epoch." Why should he continue to drag his frail and sickly carcass about a world inimical and estranged? Erasmus was weary of the life he had once loved so well. We are shaken profoundly when we read his plaintive prayer, "May God gather me soon unto Himself so that I quit this mad world." For where had the spirit room to live and to grow now that fanaticism raged through the land? The sublime realm of humanism which Erasmus had built was overrun by enemy hordes and wellnigh conquered; gone were the days of *eruditio et eloquentia*; men no longer hearkened to the subtle and delicate message of imaginative genius, but turned their ears to listen to the rough and passion-wrought babble of politics. Thought had succumbed to mob-frenzy, it had donned the uniform of Luther or of the pope; the erudite no longer waged war in elegantly phrased epistles and books, but, like fishwives, hurled gross invectives at each other's heads; none was willing to understand what his neighbour said, but instead each tried to impose his own pet belief, his particular doctrine, upon all the rest. Woe unto him who stood aside and took no part in the game! Twofold hatred was hurled against those who remained aloof. Those who live for the spirit are lonely indeed at times when passion rages. Who is there left to write for when ears are deafened with political yappings and yelpings? Delicate tones of irony pass unheeded, and subtle points of theology can no longer be discussed with people who use cannon and soldiery for arguments. A pack of hounds had been let loose upon those whose opinions differed from one's own, upon those of indepen-

dent mind. Christianity was to be served with caltrops and the executioner's sword; even men of intellect and culture, even the sturdiest and most honest believers, seized upon the roughest methods to impose their will. Tumult had come with a vengeance! From every land tidings arrived that pricked Erasmus to the heart. Berquin, his translator and pupil, had in Paris been slowly roasted to death; in England, his beloved John Fisher and Thomas More, the noblest of his friends, had perished on the scaffold (Blessed be they who possess strength enough to give their lives for the faith!) On receiving the news, Erasmus groaned: "Methinks 'tis I myself who have died." Zwingli, with whom he had exchanged so many letters and friendly words, was slain on the battlefield at Kappel; Thomas Münzer was done to death with tortures which even the heathen or the Chinese could not have made more horrible. Anabaptists had their tongues torn out, the itinerant preachers were flayed alive and burned at the stake, churches were plundered, books destroyed in the flames, cities and towns were razed to the ground, Rome, the glory of the world, was sacked—O God, what bestial excesses are committed in Thy name! Verily the world had no room for freedom of thought, for understanding and consideration, these fundamental tenets of the humanistic doctrine. Art could not flourish on so blood-drenched a soil; for decades, for centuries, perhaps for ever were gone the days of supranational community; even Latin, the language of a united Europe, the language of Erasmus's very heart, was dead. Die thou, likewise, Erasmus!

Fate pursued him to the end. The wanderer had again, for a last time, to betake himself to the road. Close on seventy, Erasmus left his house and home. An



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inexplicable yearning seized him to forsake Freiburg and journey to Brabant. The duke had invited him to come, but in reality another summoned him: Death. Erasmus was prey to a strange restlessness of soul. He who all his life had been a pilgrim in many lands, who had been a cosmopolitan, who had deliberately renounced his fatherland, of a sudden felt the need to tread for a last time the soil of his native country. His tired body longed to return whence it had come; he had a premonition that the end was near.

He was destined never to reach his goal. In a tiny postchaise, the kind that was usually employed for conveying women, he drove to Basle. The old man thought to remain there only until the ice broke and then, in the springtime, to voyage down the Rhine to the land of his birth. Meanwhile, Basle put its spell upon him. Here he felt a spiritual and intellectual warmth encompassing him, here a few staunch friends lived, Frobenius's son, Amerbach, and others. They saw to it that the invalid was made comfortable; he was housed among them. Also there was still the printing-house where he could once again see his thoughts reflected upon the printed page, where he could breathe the atmosphere of ink, where he could handle the exquisitely printed books, where he could sit in silent colloquy with the beautiful, peaceful, and informative works of the masters. In tranquil retirement, away from the noise and bustle of the world, too weary and sapless to leave his bed for more than four or five hours out of the twenty-four, Erasmus passed his last days. His heart seemed frozen, he felt that he was forgotten or despised, for the Catholics no longer wooed his favours and the Protestants made mock of him. No one needed him; no one asked his opinion, no one hung upon his words. "My foes increase in number, while my friends become fewer," he wailed despairingly in his solitude, he for whom urbane

spiritual converse had been the acme of life's beauty and happiness.

But lo, like a belated swallow, someone came knocking at his window already frosted by the cold of approaching winter. A message flew in to greet him with reverence and love. "Everything that I do, all that I am, I owe to you; and were I to fail in acknowledging my debt, I should prove the most ungrateful man alive. *Salve itaque etiam atque etiam, pater amantissime, pater desusque patriæ, literarum assertor, veritatis propugnator invictissime.*" (Greeting and yet again greeting, dearest father and honour of the land which gave you birth, champion of the arts, invincible fighter for truth.) The name of the man who wrote these words, and one which was destined to outshine even the name of Erasmus, was Rabelais, who in the dawn of his youthful glory thus acclaimed the dying master whose sun was about to set. There followed yet another letter, a letter from Rome. Impatiently, Erasmus broke the seals. Then a bitter laugh issued from between his thin lips as he let the missive drop from his hand. Was he not being made mock of? The new pope was offering him a cardinal's hat, a post that was lucrative, to him who had his life long refused all situations which might curtail his intellectual independence. Proudly he laid the almost galling honour aside. "Shall I, a dying man, burden myself with something which I have hitherto invariably refused to shoulder?" No, he must die a free man as he has lived a free man. Free, dressed as a burgher, without decorations and mundane honours, free as are all solitaries, and alone as are all the free spirits of this world.

The truest friend of the solitary, one who never quits his side, one who is always ready to act as comforter, Dame Work, she remained with Erasmus to the last. His body tortured with sickness, lying for the most part in bed, his hand trembling with weakness and age, he

wrote and wrote, day in day out, composing his commentary on Origen, sending off letters, preparing pamphlets for the press. No longer was he writing for celebrity's sake, nor was it for money that he laboured, but simply and solely for the secret pleasure of learning by spiritualizing life, and, by learning, to strengthen his own life. To inhale knowledge and to exhale it, this eternal systole and diastole of earthly existence, only this circle of movement and activity kept his blood aflow. Toiling to the last, he fled from the real world through the sacred groves and labyrinths of work, away from the world which no longer recognized him or understood him, from the world which had no desire even to recognize him or understand him. In due course the Bringer of Peace stood at his bedside, and now that death was so close upon him, Erasmus, who had always dreaded his advent, looked up at him calmly and wellnigh gratefully. His mind remained clear to the last, he compared the friends gathered about him, Frobenius and Amerbach, with Job's comforters, conversing with them in witty and elegant Latin. Just before the end, when the death-rattle was already heard in his throat, a strange thing happened. He who had always spoken Latin and thought and written in Latin, suddenly forgot that tongue, and, with the primitive fear of the animal upon him, he stammered out the words he had learned in earliest childhood, "lieve God"—the first words and the last words Erasmus ever spoke were in the Teutonic vernacular. One more breath, and then he got what he had longed that all humanity should receive—Peace.



## Chapter 11

### ERASMUS'S LEGACY

AT the very time when Erasmus, on his deathbed, bequeathed his spiritual inheritance of European unity as the sublimest ideal to coming generations there appeared in Florence one of the most momentous books the world had ever seen. This was a famous work by Niccolo Machiavelli, entitled *Il Principe*. In this mathematically clear text-book of the ruthless exercise of power and conquest in the realm of politics, we find the counterpoise to Erasmus's teaching plainly set forth and formulated as if in a catechism. Whilst Erasmus demanded that princes and peoples should freely and peaceably subordinate their personal, their egoistic, their imperialistic claims to a fraternal commonwealth of the whole of mankind, Machiavelli belauded the will to power of every prince, acclaiming this as the highest and as the only aim of every nation. All the forces of the commonalty should, he maintained, be made to serve the folk-idea with as much devotion as though it were a religious idea; the *raison d'état*, the utmost development of the individuality, must become the only visible object and goal of historical evolution, and their ruthless achievement must be looked upon as the sublimest duty within the orbit of world occurrences. For Machiavelli, power and the development of power were the ultimate expression of the individual or the collective personality; for Erasmus it was justice.

Thus, for all time, the two great fundamental forms of world politics were given their intellectual shape, the

practical as against the ideal, diplomacy as against ethics, State politics as against humane politics. Erasmus, the philosopher contemplating the world, held, as did Aristotle, Plato, and Thomas Aquinas, that politics should be placed in the same category as ethics; a prince, as the leader of the State, should first of all be the servant of the divine, the exponent of the ethical ideal. Machiavelli, with the practical experience of a diplomatist, made politics an amoral and independent science, saying that it had as little to do with ethics as had astronomy and geometry. A prince, or a leader of a State, had no business to be dreaming dreams about humanity, that vague and intangible concept, but should reckon quite unsentimentally with men only as the concrete material which should be utilized with all its forces and its weaknesses to the personal advancement of the prince and of the nation he governed. Clearly and coldly, with as little consideration as a chess-player towards his partner, a prince should go his way, and by every means permissible and unpermissible, ensure the utmost advantage and dominion for his own people. Power and expansion of power were for Machiavelli the supremest duty, and success the decisive justification of both prince and people.

In the material realm of history the principle of power has achieved a predominant position. Not so Erasmus's ideal of politics based upon conciliation and the unity of mankind. The concepts set forth in *Il Principe* have held the field, the policy of seizing every opportunity to reinforce the personal power of a sovereign has presided over the dramatic development of European history ever since that day. Generations of diplomats have drunk at the spring tapped by the terribly keen-minded Florentine. The barriers between nations have been built of blood and iron, barriers for ever shifting and changing. Conflict instead of community of interests has made good its claim to monopolize the best energies of the

European peoples. Never has Erasmus's thought taken sufficient shape and substance to exercise a tangible influence upon the moulding of European destinies. The great humanistic dream of the solution of disagreements in a spirit of justice, the longed-for unification of the nations under the ægis of a common culture, has remained a Utopia, never yet established, and, maybe, impossible of achievement within the domain of reality.

Nevertheless, in the realm of mind there is room for every kind of contrast. Even that which in the concrete world can never be victorious, remains in that other as a dynamic force, and unfulfilled ideals often prove the most unconquerable. An idea which does not take on material shape is not necessarily a conquered idea or a false idea; it may represent a need which, though its gratification be postponed, is and remains a need. Nay, more: an ideal which, because it has failed to secure embodiment in action, is neither worn out nor compromised in any way, continues to work as a ferment in subsequent generations, urging them to the achievement of a higher morality. Those ideals only which have failed to put on concrete form are capable of everlasting resurrection.

In the mental sphere, therefore, the humanistic ideal, Erasmus's ideal, the first visible effort to bring about European unity, has suffered no depreciation because it failed to achieve dominion and wielded hardly any political power. The essence of volition is not to be above party, but invariably to be biased and to belong to a majority. We can harbour only a very faint hope that the calm and composure of mind which Goethe held to be the holiest and sublimest form of life will ever take shape and content in the soul of the masses of mankind. The humanistic ideal, that ideal grounded upon breadth of vision and clarity of mind, is destined to remain a spiritual and aristocratic dream which few mortals are capable of dreaming, but which those few inherit as a



sacred legacy held in trust for others who shall come after and be handed down from one generation to the next. The idea of a future when all mankind shall work harmoniously together towards a common destiny, has never, even during the darkest hours of European history, been utterly lost sight of.

Erasmus, that disappointed old man who none the less was never disappointed, labouring in the midst of the warring nations and a Europe ravaged and laid waste, collected the materials of a legacy which was nothing other than the ancient dream of every religion, of every myth, the dream of a coming and irresistible humanization of mankind, of a triumph of the unclouded and just-minded reason over selfish and ephemeral passions. Though his hand was unsure and often hesitant, Erasmus was the first to give this ideal a practical shape, and this ideal has been looked up to with hope renewed by all the generations of Europeans which have arisen since his day. No thought that is the outcome of the fusion of clear thinking with high moral energy, can wholly disappear; even though the hand may falter and the structure be incomplete, the ethical spirit will shape it anew. Erasmus, the conquered, has earned his fame here below because he broke trail in the world of literature for humanistic ideals. It is to him we owe this simplest of thoughts, and this most undying of thoughts, namely that it is mankind's highest duty to seek to become humaner, more spiritual, and increasingly capable of sympathetic, and spiritual, understanding. Montaigne, who looked upon "inhumaneness as the worst of all burdens," declaring it something "*que je n'ay point le courage de concevoir sans horreur*," continued to preach the message of comprehension and forbearance his master, Erasmus, had launched upon the world. Spinoza demanded that, instead of being guided by blind passion, men should, rather, look to the *amor intellectualis*; Diderot, Voltaire, and Lessing,

sceptics and idealists at one and the same time, were continually at war against narrow-mindedness and bigotry, advocating in their stead "a tolerance full of understanding." Schiller gave the message of world-citizenship a poetic dress; Kant demanded everlasting peace; again and again, down to the days of Tolstoy, and later with Gandhi and Romain Rolland, this same ideal has been reiterated with logical force, and the spirit of understanding has claimed its ethical and moral rights as a counterblast to the club-law of authority and violence.

With faith ever freshly renewed, men still look to the possibility of a reconciliation between the nations, and the hope arises all the stronger in the human heart precisely at those moments when confusion and horror are abroad in the land. For man cannot live and work without the comforting delusion that humanity is really capable of rising to a higher moral plane, without his dream that in the end he and his fellow-mortals will be reconciled and will understand one another. And though there are shrewd and calculating persons who maintain that the fulfilment of the Erasmian dream is out of the question, and although the present trend of things may seem to show that they are right; nevertheless such "hard-headed and practical" persons must again and again be reminded that there exist bonds as well as barriers between the nations, and that in the hearts of men the ardent hopes of a coming age when a higher humanity will exist, are unceasingly renewed. A promise is thus contained within the legacy, a promise which is full of creative force for the future. For what the mind is capable of lifting from the narrow circle of the individual life and hurling forth into the realm of the universally human, that alone is capable of endowing us with strength beyond the strength of the individual. Men and nations can find their true and sacred measure only by making suprapersonal and hardly realizable claims.

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Future generations will wonder why, after so splendid a dawn, we were forced back into Cimmerian darkness.

—CASTELLIO, in *De arte dubitandi*, 1562.

## Introduction

He who, though he falleth, is stubborn in his courage, and, being in danger of imminent death, is no whit daunted in his assurance: but, in yielding up the ghost, beholds his enemy with a scornful and fierce look—he is vanquished, not by us, but by fortune: he is slain, but not conquered. The most valiant are often the most unfortunate. So are there triumphant losses more to be envied than victories.

—MONTAIGNE, *Of Cannibals*.

“A FLY attacking an elephant.” Such is the manuscript interpolation, in Sebastian Castellio’s own handwriting, on the Basle copy of his polemic against Calvin. At first it repels us a little, and we are inclined to regard it as one of the hyperbolical utterances to which the humanists were prone. Yet Castellio’s words were neither hyperbolical nor ironical. By the crude contrast, this doughty fighter merely intended to convey clearly to his friend Amerbach his own profound and distressing conviction that he was challenging a colossal antagonist, when he publicly charged Calvin with having been instigated by fanatical dogmatism in putting a man to death and thus slaughtering freedom of conscience under the Reformation.

When Castellio entered the lists in this perilous tourney, taking up his pen as a knight a lance, he was aware that a purely spiritual attack upon a dictatorship in the panoply of material armour would prove ineffectual, and that he was, therefore, fighting for a lost cause. How could an unarmed man, a solitary, expect to vanquish Calvin, who was backed by thousands and tens of thousands, and equipped with all the powers of the State? A master of the art of organization, Calvin had been able

to transform a whole city, a whole State, whose numerous burghers had hitherto been freemen, into a rigidly obedient machine; had been able to extirpate independence, and to lay an embargo on freedom of thought in favour of his own exclusive doctrine. The powers of the State were under his supreme control; as wax in his hands were the various authorities, Town Council and Consistory, university and law courts, finance and morality, priests and schools, catchpoles and prisons, the written and the spoken and even the secretly whispered word. His doctrine had become law, and any one who ventured to question it was soon taught—by arguments that burked discussion, by the arguments of every spiritual tyranny, by gaol, exile, or burning at the stake—how in Geneva only one truth was valid, the truth of which Calvin was the prophet.

But the sinister power of the sinister zealot extended far beyond the walls of Geneva. The Swiss federated cities regarded him as their chief political ally; throughout the western world, the Protestants had appointed this "*violentissimus Christianus*" their commander-in-chief; kings and princes vied with one another in wooing the favour of a militant ecclesiastic who had established in Europe a Church organization second only in power (if second) to that ruled by the Roman pontiff. Nothing could happen in the political world without his knowledge; very little could happen there in defiance of his will. It had become as dangerous to offend the preacher of St. Pierre as to offend emperor or pope.

What was his adversary, Sebastian Castellio, the lonely idealist who, in the name of freedom of thought, had renounced allegiance to Calvin's as to every other spiritual tyranny? Reckoning up the material forces available to the two men, it is no exaggeration to compare one of them to a fly and the other to an elephant. Castellio was a nemo, a nobody, a nullity, as far as public influence was



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in question; he was, moreover, an impoverished scholar, hard put to make a living for wife and children by translations and private tuition; a refugee in a foreign land, where he had no civil status nor even the right of residence, an *émigré* twice over: and, as always happens in days when the world has gone mad with fanaticism, the humanist was powerless and isolated amid contending zealots.

For years this great and modest and humane man of learning lived under the twin shadows of persecution and poverty, always in pitiful straits, yet inwardly free, because bound by no party ties, and because he had not let himself become enslaved by any of the prevailing forms of fanaticism. Not until his conscience was outraged by Calvin's murder of Servetus did he put aside his peaceful labours and attack the dictator, in the name of the desecrated rights of man. Not until then did this solitary prove himself a hero. Whereas his veteran opponent had a compact train of devoted followers (or, if not devoted, held in the trammels of a harsh discipline), Castellio could count on the support of no party, whether Catholic or Protestant. There was no great man, no emperor and no king to protect him, as such had protected Luther and Erasmus. Even the few friends and intimates who admired his courage, ventured only in secret to say a cheering word.

Dangerous indeed to life or limb was the public defence of a thinker who dared espouse the cause of the persecuted when fanatics were heresy-hunting and were racking or burning those who differed from them. Nor did Castellio confine himself to particular cases; he denied that those in the seats of the mighty were entitled to harm any one because of private opinions. Here was a man who, during one of those periods of collective insanity with which the world is from time to time afflicted, dared to keep his mind immune from popular hallucina-

tions, and to designate by their true name of murder the slaughterings which purported to be made for the greater glory of God. Humane feeling compelled him to raise his lone voice, saying "I can no longer keep silence," and to besiege the heavens with clamours of despair concerning man's inhumanity to man. So perennial is the cowardice of our race, that Castellio and his like who defy those in high places, need look for few, if any, supporters. Thus it came to pass that in the decisive hour Sebastian Castellio found no backers, while his whole possessions were those which form the inalienable property of the militant artist: an unyielding conscience in an undismayed soul.

Yet for the very reason that Sebastian Castellio knew from the first that his campaign would be unavailing and precisely because, knowing this, he unhesitatingly followed the call of conscience, his sacred stubbornness stamps for all time as a hero this "unknown soldier" in mankind's great war of liberation. Because he had the courage to make his passionate protest against a world-wide terror, Castellio's feud with Calvin must remain everlastingly memorable. In respect of the underlying problems, moreover, this historical struggle transcends the time limits of the period during which it took place. It was not a dispute about some narrowly definable theological point, nor about the man Servetus; nor was it one to decide the issue between liberal and orthodox Protestantism. A question of far wider scope and a timeless question was at stake in this contest. *Nostra res agitur*. A battle was opened which, under other names and in changing forms, has perpetually to be re-fought. Theology was no more than an accidental mask, worn because theology was the mode in sixteenth-century Geneva (and elsewhere). Castellio and Calvin were the symbolical expressions of an invisible but irreconcilable conflict. It matters not whether we term the poles of this enduring conflict toleration versus intolerance, freedom versus



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tutelage, humaneness versus fanaticism, individuality against mechanical uniformity, conscience against violence. In the last analysis these names signify an inward and personal decision as to which counts more for us: mankind or politics, the ethos or the logos, personality or community.

Every nation, every epoch, every thoughtful human being, has again and again to establish the landmarks between freedom and authority: for, in the absence of authority, liberty degenerates into licence, and chaos ensues; and authority becomes tyranny unless it be tempered by freedom. Buried deep in human nature is a mystical longing for the absorption of self into the community; and ineradicable is the conviction that it must be possible to discover some specific religious, national, or social system which will definitively bestow peace and order upon mankind. With pitiless logic, Dostoevski's Grand Inquisitor proved that, for the most part, men are afraid of the gift of freedom; and in very truth the generality, from slackness in face of the enigmas that have to be solved and the responsibilities life imposes, crave for the mechanization of the world by a definitive and universally valid order which will save them the trouble of thinking.

This messianic yearning for a perdurable solution of the riddle of conduct is the ferment which smoothes obstacles out of the path of prophets. When the ideals of one generation have lost their fire, their zest, their vivid tints—enough for a man (or woman) equipped with strong powers of suggestion to declare apodictically that he and he alone has discovered the new and true formulas, and myriads will confidently accept the teachings of the nth messiah. A new ideology always creates a new type of idealism, and this is doubtless the metaphysical significance of ideologies. For whoever can give men a new illusion of unity and purity, will instantly



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stimulate the holiest of human energies : self-sacrifice and enthusiasm. Millions, as if under a spell, are ready to surrender themselves, to allow themselves to be fertilized, even to submit to rape ; and the more such a revealer or prophet asks of them, the more they are willing to give. Liberty, which yesterday seemed to them their greatest good and their highest pleasure, they will fling away for his sake, and will unresistingly follow the leader, fulfilling the Tacitean aspiration "*ruere in servitium*," so that, throughout history, the peoples, in a desire for solidarity, have voluntarily put their necks under the yoke and have kissed the hand into which they themselves have pressed the goad.

Thoughtful persons must be uplifted by the recognition that what, again and again in the story of our ancient, jejune, and mechanized world, has worked such miracles of suggestion, has ever been the power of an idea—that most immaterial of forces. We incline, therefore, to yield to the temptation of admiring these world-befoolers, who have succeeded in influencing crass matter by the might of the spirit. But, having gained the victory, such idealists and utopists, almost without exception, incontinently prove the worst of cheats. Power impels them to grasp universal power, victory leads to a misuse of victory ; and, instead of congratulating themselves on having persuaded so many to accept their own pet illusions, on having gained disciples glad to live or to die for the cause, these conquistadors succumb to the itch for converting majority into totality. They crave to enforce their dogma upon those who are not party-members. The pliable, the satellites, the soul-slaves, the camp-followers of any big movement, do not suffice a dictator. Never will he be content until the free, the few independents, have become his toadies and their serfs ; and, in order to make his doctrine universal, he arranges for the State to brand nonconformity as

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crime. Ever renewed is this curse that awaits religious and political ideologies, compelling them to degenerate into tyrannies as soon as they have established dictatorships. But directly a priest or a prophet ceases to confide in the immanent power of his faith or his teaching, and seeks to diffuse it by force, he declares war upon liberty. No matter what the dominant idea may be, whenever it has recourse to terror as the instrument for imposing uniformity upon alien convictions, it is no longer idealism but brutality. Even the purest of truths, when forcibly thrust upon malcontents, becomes the sin against the Holy Ghost.

This ghost, this spirit, is a mysterious element. Impalpable and invisible as air, it seems to enter without resistance into all forms and formulas. It misleads persons of despotic temperament into the fancy that they can compress it as much as they please, and reduce it to obedience in sealed flasks. But to every compression, it reacts dynamically by a proportional counter-pressure; and when very strongly compressed, it becomes an explosive, so that suppressive measures always lead to revolt. It is a consoling fact that, in the end, the moral independence of mankind remains indestructible. Never has it been possible for a dictatorship to enforce one religion or one philosophy upon the whole world. Nor will it ever be possible, for the spirit always escapes from servitude; refuses to think in accordance with prescribed forms, to become shallow and supine at the word of command, to allow uniformity to be permanently imposed upon it. How stupid and how futile is the attempt to reduce to a common denominator the divine multiplicity of existence, to divide human beings arbitrarily into black and white, good and bad, sheep and goats, true believers and heretics, loyalists and disloyalists—on the ground of a “principle” based exclusively upon the use of the strong hand. Always and everywhere there will crop up inde-

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pendents who sturdily resist any such restriction of human liberty, "conscientious objectors" of one sort and another; nor has any age been so barbaric, or any tyranny so systematic, but that individuals have been found willing and able to evade the coercion which subjugates the majority, and to defend their right to set up their personal convictions, their own truth, against the alleged "one and only truth" of the monomaniacs of power.

In the sixteenth century, although then as now the ideology of violence was rampant, there were free and incorruptible spirits. Letters from the humanists of those days bear witness to a profound distress at the disturbances caused by the champions of force. We are strongly moved by their detestation for the cheapjacks of dogma who cried in the marketplace: "What we teach, is true; and what we do not teach, is false." As enlightened cosmopolitans, the humanists were horrified by the inhumanity of the "reformers." These ran riot over the western world which had nurtured a faith in beauty, and they foamed at the mouth while proclaiming their violent orthodoxies—men such as Savonarola, Calvin, and John Knox, who wished to make an end of beauty and to transform the globe into a moral seminary. With fateful perspicacity the humanists foresaw the disasters which such rabidly self-satisfied men would bring upon Europe. Through the clamour of tongues was already audible the clash of weapons, and the coming of a disastrous war could be confidently prophesied. But the humanists, though they knew the truth, did not dare fight for the truth. Almost always in life the lots are parted, so that a man of insight is not a man of action, and a man of action is not a man of insight. These sad-hearted humanists exchanged touching and admirably written letters, and complained often enough behind the closed doors of their studies; but none of them came into the open to defy



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Antichrist. Erasmus ventured, now and again, to shoot a few arrows out of his ambush. Rabelais, wearing fool's cap and motley, used fierce laughter as a scourge. Montaigne, a noble and wise philosopher, wrote eloquently about the matter in his *Essays*. But none of them struck shrewd blows in the endeavour to prevent the infamous persecutions and executions. Rendered cautious by experience, they said that the sage could find better occupation than attempting to control a mad dog, that it was a sensible man's part to keep in the background lest he should himself become one of the victims.

Castellio, however, earned his title to imperishable fame by being the one humanist to leave cover and wittingly to meet his fate. Heroically he espoused the cause of his persecuted companions, and thereby threw away his life. Unfanatically, though daily and hourly threatened by the fanatics, dispassionately, with Tolstoyan imperturbability, hoisting like a banner his conviction that no man should be subjected to force for holding this or that opinion as to the nature of the universe, he declared that no earthly power was entitled to exercise authority over a man's conscience. And because he uttered these opinions, not in the name of a party but as a spontaneous expression of the imperishable spirit of mankind, his thoughts, like many of his words, can never fade. Universally human and timeless thoughts, when minted by an artist, retain for ever the sharpness of their first moulding; and an avowal which tends to promote world unity will outlast disuniting, aggressive, and doctrinaire utterances. The unique courage of this forgotten worthy should serve as example to later generations, above all in the moral sphere. For when, in defiance of the theologians, Castellio styled Calvin's victim Servetus "a murdered innocent"; when, in reply to Calvin's sophisms, he thundered the imperishable utterance, "to burn a man alive does not defend a

doctrine but slays a man''; when, in his *Manifesto on behalf of Toleration* (long before Locke, Hume, and Voltaire, and much more splendidly than they), he proclaimed once for all the right to freedom of thought—he knew that he was hazarding his life for the sake of his convictions. Let not the reader suppose that Castellio's protest against the judicial murder of Miguel Servetus was on the same footing as the much more celebrated protests of Voltaire in the case of Jean Calas, and of Zola in the Dreyfus affair. Such comparisons nowise detract from the outstanding moral grandeur of what Castellio did. Voltaire, when he took up the cudgels for Calas, was living in a humaner age, and, as a famous writer, could count on the protection of kings and princes. Similarly Zola was backed by an invisible army, by the admiration of Europe and the world. Voltaire and Zola were doubtless risking reputation and comfort, but neither of them ventured his life. That is what Castellio ventured, knowing that in his fight for humaneness he would concentrate upon his luckless head all the inhumaneness of the cruel century in which he lived.

Sebastian Castellio had to pay the full price for his heroism, a price which emptied his energies to the dregs. This advocate of non-violence, who wished to use none but spiritual weapons, was throttled by brute force. Again and again do we see, as here, that there is scant hope of success for one who has at his command no other power than that of moral rectitude, and who, standing alone, joins battle with a compact organization. As soon as a doctrine has got control of the State apparatus and the instruments of pressure which the State can wield, it unhesitatingly establishes a reign of terror. The words of any one who challenges its omnipotence are stifled, and usually the dissentient speaker's or writer's neck is wrung as well. Calvin never attempted seriously to answer Castellio, preferring to reduce his critic to



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silence. Castellio's writings were censored, placed under an embargo, and destroyed wherever found. By the exercise of political influence, the adjoining canton was induced to deny him freedom of utterance within its borders. Then, as soon as his power of protest or criticism had been destroyed, when he could not even report the measures that were being taken against him, Calvin's satellites calumniously attacked him. There was no longer a struggle between two adversaries equipped with like weapons, but the ruthless bludgeoning of an unarmed man by a horde of ruffians. Calvin held sway over the printing presses, the pulpits, the professorial chairs, and the synods. Castellio's steps were dogged; eavesdroppers listened to his every word; his letters were intercepted. Can we wonder that such a briarean organization could easily get the better of the lonely humanist; that nothing but Castellio's premature death saved him from exile or the stake? The triumphant dogmatist and his successors did not scruple to wreak vengeance on their adversary's corpse. Suspicion and base invectives, posthumously disseminated, destroyed it like quicklime, and scattered ashes over his name. The memory of the solitary who had not only resisted Calvin's dictatorship, but had inveighed against the basic principle of dictatorship over the things of the spirit, was, so the zealots hoped, to pass from the minds of men for ever.

This last extremity of force was very nearly successful. Not merely was Castellio disarmed, gagged, and bound while his life lasted, but the methodical suppression of references to the great humanist consigned him to oblivion for many years after he was dead. Down to this day, a scholar need not blush never to have heard or mentioned the name of Sebastian Castellio. How could scholars know about him, seeing that the censorship of his chief writings endured for decades and for centuries?



No printer who worked within Calvin's sphere of influence was bold enough to publish them; and when they at length appeared it was too late for them to establish his renown as pioneer. Others, meanwhile, had adopted his ideas. The campaign he initiated and in which he fell, was carried on in the wake of other standard-bearers. Many are foredoomed to live in the shadows, to die in the dark—village Hampdens and mute inglorious Miltons. Those who followed in Castellio's footsteps, harvested and garnered his fame; and in every schoolbook we may still read the error that Locke and Hume were the first advocates of toleration, the blunder being repeated and repeated as heedlessly as if Castellio's *De haereticis* had never been penned and printed. Forgotten is the author's moral courage, forgotten his campaign on behalf of Servetus, forgotten the war against Calvin ("a fly attacking an elephant"), forgotten are his writings. They are inadequately represented in the Dutch collected edition of translations; we find a few manuscripts in Swiss and Netherland libraries, and know of some utterances about Castellio by grateful pupils—these are the whole "remains" of a man whose contemporaries almost unanimously regarded him as one, not only of the most learned, but also of the most noble-minded, of his century. Great is the debt of gratitude still to be paid to this forgotten champion, and crying the injustice still to be remedied.

History has no time to be just. It is her business, as impartial chronicler, to record successes, but she rarely appraises their moral worth. She keeps her eyes fixed on the victorious, and leaves the vanquished in the shadows. Carelessly these "unknown soldiers" are shovelled into the common fosse of forgetfulness. *Nulla crux, nulla corona*—neither cross nor garland—records their fruitless sacrifice. In truth, however, no effort made by the pure at heart should be deemed futile or stigmatized as bar-

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ren; nor is any expenditure of moral energy dissipated into vasty space to leave no repercussions. Though vanquished, those who lived before the time was ripe have found significance in the fulfilment of a timeless ideal; for an idea is only quickened to life in the real world through the endeavours of those who conceived it where none could witness the conception, and were ready for its sake to advance along the road to dusty death. Spiritually considered, the words "victory" and "defeat" acquire new meanings. Hence we must never cease to remind a world which has eyes only for monuments to conquerors, that the true heroes of our race are not those who reach their transitory realms across hecatombs of corpses, but those who, lacking power to resist, succumb to superior force—as Castellio was overpowered by Calvin in his struggle for the freedom of the spirit and for the ultimate establishment of the kingdom of humanness upon earth.

## Chapter 1

### CALVIN'S SEIZURE OF POWER

ON Sunday, May 21, 1536, the burghers of Geneva, formally summoned by a trumpet blast, assembled in the principal square, and, raising their right hands, unanimously declared that henceforward they would live exclusively "*selon l'évangile et la parole de Dieu.*"

It was by referendum (an ultra-democratic institution which is still in vogue in Switzerland) and in the sometime episcopal palace, that the reformed religion was thus declared to be the only valid and permitted faith in Geneva—to be the faith of the city-State. A few years had sufficed, not merely to drive the old Catholic faith from the town beside the Rhone, but to pulverize it and completely to extirpate it. Amid the menaces of the mob, the last priests, canons, monks, and nuns were expelled from the cloisters, while the churches, without exception, were purified from graven images and other tokens of "superstition." Then at length came this May Festival to seal the triumph. From that date, in Geneva, Protestantism had not merely the upper hand, but held exclusive sway.

This radical and unrestricted establishment of the reformed religion in Geneva was mainly the work of one terrorist, Farel the preacher. A man of fanatical temperament, with a narrow brow, domineering and relentless. "Never in my life had I seen so presumptuous and shameless a creature," says the gentle Erasmus. This "French Luther" exerted an overwhelming influence upon the masses. Small of stature, hideous, with a red beard and untidy hair, he thundered at them from the



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pulpit, and the fury of his violent nature aroused an emotional storm in the populace. Like Danton, a revolutionist in politics, so Farel, a revolutionist in the religious field, was able to combine the scattered and hidden instincts of the crowd, and to kindle them to a united onslaught. A hundred times before the victory, Farel had ventured his life, threatened in the countryside with stoning, arrested and put under the ban by all the authorities; but with the primitive energy and unscrupulousness of a man dominated by one idea, he forcibly broke down resistance. Attended by a bodyguard of storm troops, he rioted into a Catholic church while the priest at the altar was celebrating mass, he forced his way into the pulpit and, amid the acclamations of his supporters, fulminated against Antichrist. He organized the street arabs into a second army at his service, inciting gangs of children to raid the cathedral at service time, and to disturb the devotions of the Catholics by screams, a quacking noise like that of ducks, and outbursts of laughter. At length, emboldened by the growing number of his adherents, he mobilized his guards for the last attack, and instructed them to violate the monasteries, tear down the images of saints from the walls and burn these "idols." This method of brute force was successful. A small but active minority can intimidate the majority by showing exceptional courage, and by readiness to use the methods of a terror—provided that the majority, however large, is slack. Though the Catholics complained of these breaches of the peace, and tried to set the Town Council to work, on the whole they sat quietly in their houses, until, in the end, the bishop handed over his see to the victorious Reformation, and ran away without striking a blow.

But now, in the way of triumph, it became apparent that Farel was a typical uncreative revolutionist, able, by impetus and fanaticism, to overthrow the old order,

but not competent to bring a new one into being. He was an adept at abuse, but devoid of formative talent; a disturber, not a constructor. He could rail against the Roman Church, could incite the dull-witted masses to hatred for monks and nuns; with sacrilegious hands, he could break the tables of the law. Having done this, he contemplated with hopeless perplexity the ruin he had made, for he had no goal in view. Now, when new principles were to be established in Geneva to take the place of the Catholic religion which had been driven out, Farel was a failure. Being a purely destructive spirit, he could only make a vacancy; for a street-corner revolutionist is never of the intellectually constructive type, destruction ends his task; another must follow in his footsteps to undertake the work of rebuilding.

Farel did not stand alone in his uncertainty at this critical moment. In Germany, likewise, and in other parts of Switzerland than Geneva, the leaders of the Reformation were disunited, hesitant, and perplexed at the mission history had assigned them. What Luther and Zwingli had originally planned was nothing else than a purification of the existing Church, a leading back of the faithful from the authority of the pope and the councils to the forgotten evangelical doctrine. For them, the Reformation signified at the outset that the Church was to be re-formed, that is to say, was to be bettered, purified, restored to its primitive integrity. Since, however, the Catholic Church stubbornly held to its views and would make no concession, they were faced by the need for working outside the Catholic Church instead of within—and forthwith, for when it is necessary to pass on beyond the destructive to the productive, there is a parting of the ways. Of course, there could have been nothing more logical than that the religious revolutionists, Luther, Zwingli and the other theologians of the Reformation, should have united in brotherly fashion



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upon a unified creed and a unified practice for the new Church. But when have the logical and the natural swayed the course of history? Instead of a worldwide and united Protestant Church, a number of petty Churches sprang up all over the place. Wittenburg would not hear a word of the theology of Zurich. Geneva repudiated the practices of Berne. Each town wished to have a Reformation of its own, in the Zurich, Bernese, or Genevese fashion. In every crisis, the nationalist arrogance of the European States was prophetically foreshadowed on a small scale in the arrogance of the cantonal spirit. In acrimonious disputations, in theological hair-splittings and tracts, Luther, Zwingli, Melancthon, Bucer, Karlstadt, and the rest of them, now proceeded to squander the energies which had served, so long as they held together, to undermine the gigantic structure of the *Ecclesia Universalis*. Farel was absolutely impotent in Geneva when he contemplated the ruins of the old order; this being the typical tragedy of one who has embraced the mission assigned to him by history, but is unequal to the duties that are imposed on him as a consequence of acceptance.

It was in a happy hour that the man who had been so luckless as to triumph, heard, by chance, that Calvin, the famous Jehan Calvin, was staying for a day in Geneva on his way home from Savoy. Farel hastened to call at the inn where Calvin put up, to ask the leader's advice and help as regards the work of reconstruction. For although Calvin was no more than six-and-twenty, being thus two decades younger than Farel, he already had uncontested authority. The son of an episcopal tax-gatherer and notary, born at Noyon in Picardy, educated (as Erasmus and Loyola had been) under the strict disciplines of Montagu College, being first intended for



the priestly caste and then switched off in the direction of a legal career, Jehan Calvin (or Chauvin) had at the age of twenty-four to flee from France to Basle, owing to his advocacy of Lutheran doctrines.

Most refugees forfeit their internal energies when they leave their homeland, but to Calvin what happened in this respect proved advantageous. At Basle, where two of the main roads of Europe crossed one another, and where the various forms of Protestantism encountered and conflicted with one another, Calvin, having enormous insight and being a profound logician, recognized the weighty significance of the hour. More and ever more radical theses had split away from the core of evangelical doctrine; pantheists and atheists, enthusiasts and zealots, were beginning to dechristianize and to superchristianize Protestantism. The dreadful tragedy-comedy of the Anabaptists of Münster had already come to a bloody and awesome close; the Reformation was in danger of breaking up into separate sects, and of becoming national instead of establishing itself as a universal power like its counterpart, the Roman Church. With the self-confidence of an inspired prophet, this man of twenty-five immediately realized what steps must be taken to prevent such a split in the reformed faith. The new doctrine must be spiritually crystallized in a book, a schema, a programme; the creative principles of evangelical dogma needed to be formulated. Aglow with the courage of youth, Calvin, an unknown jurist and theologian, recognized these necessities from the first. While the accepted leaders were still disputing about details, he looked resolutely towards the whole, producing in a year his *Institutio religionis Christianae* (1535), the first publication to contain the principles of evangelical doctrine, so that it became the primer and guide-book, the canonical work of Protestantism.

## CALVIN'S SEIZURE OF POWER

This *Institutio* is one of the ten or twenty books in the world of which we must say without exaggeration that they have determined the course of history and have changed the face of Europe. It was the most important deed of the Reformation after Luther's translation of the Bible, and immediately began to influence Calvin's contemporaries by its inexorable logic and resolute constructiveness—qualities which made its influence decisive. Spiritual movements need a genius to initiate them and another genius to bring them to a close. Luther, the inspirer, set the stone of the Reformation rolling; Calvin, the organizer, stopped the movement before it broke into a thousand fragments. In a sense it may be said, therefore, that the *Institutio* rounded off the religious revolution, as the *Code Napoléon* rounded off the French. Both, drawing decisive lines, summed up what had gone before; both of them deprived a stormy and raging movement of the fiery impetus of its beginning, in order to stamp upon it the forms of law and stability. Thus arbitrariness became dogma, and freedom led to the birth of dictatorship, while spiritual ardour was rigidly shackled. Of course, whenever a revolution is bridled, it forfeits a good deal of its dynamic power. This is what happened to the Reformation in Calvin's hands; but the upshot was that thenceforward the Catholic Church as a spiritually unified and worldwide entity was contraposed by a Protestant Church occupying a similar position.

Calvin's extraordinary strength is shown by the fact that he never mitigated or modified the rigidity of his first formulations. Subsequent editions of his book were expansions, but never corrections, of his first decisive cognitions. At five-and-twenty, like Marx or Schopenhauer, before gaining any experience, he logically thought out his philosophy to its conclusion. The remainder of his life was destined to witness the transplantation of this philosophy from the ideal world to the real

one. He never altered an important word in what he had written; he never retraced a footstep, and never made a move in the direction of compromise with an adversary. Those who have to do with such a man must either break him or be broken by him. Half measures either for him or against him are futile. Unless you repudiate him, you must subjugate yourself to him without reserve.

Farel (and therein is shown Farel's greatness) became aware of this at the first meeting, during the first conversation. Though so much older in years, from that hour he subordinated himself unreservedly to Calvin. He regarded Calvin as his leader and master, himself becoming a servant, a slave of that master. Never, during the next thirty years, did Farel venture to contradict a word uttered by his junior. In every struggle, in every cause, he took Calvin's side, hastening to join Calvin at any summons, to fight for him and aid him. Farel was the first disciple to tender that unquestioning, uncritical, and self-sacrificing obedience on which Calvin, a fanatical subordinator, insisted as being the supreme duty of every disciple. Only one request did Farel ever make of Calvin, and this was at the opening of their acquaintance. He wanted Calvin, as the sole competent receiver, to take over the spiritual leadership of Geneva, where the master, with his outstanding powers, would upbuild the Reformation in a way which had been beyond Farel's own strength.

Calvin disclosed later how long and how stubbornly he had refused to comply with this amazing call. For those who are children of the spirit rather than children of the flesh, it will always be a very responsible decision when they are asked to leave the sphere of pure thought in order to enter the obscure and disturbed regions of political realism. Such a secret dread mastered Calvin for a while. He hesitated, vacillated, said he was too



young and too inexperienced. He begged Farel to leave him quietly in the world of books and problems. At length Farel lost patience at this obstinate renouncement of a call, and, with the sublime force of one of the Old Testament prophets, he thundered: "You plead the importance of your studies. In the name of Almighty God I declare unto you that His curse will light on you if you refuse your help in the Lord's work, and seek anything else in the world than Christ."

This emotional appeal moved Calvin and decided his career. He declared himself ready to upbuild the new order in Geneva. What he had hitherto been sketching and drafting in words and ideas, was now to become deeds and works. Instead of stamping the form of his will upon a book, he would henceforward try to impress it upon a city and a State.

The people who know least about a historical epoch are those who live in it. Moments of supreme importance clamour vainly for their attention; and hardly ever do the decisive hours of an era receive adequate notice from its chroniclers. Thus in the minutes of the Town Council of Geneva for the sitting of September 5, 1536, we read of Farel's proposal to appoint Calvin "*lecteur de la Sainte Escripiture*," but the minute-taker did not trouble to inscribe the name of the man who was to make Geneva famous throughout the world. The minute-secretary aridly records how Farel proposed that "*iste Gallus*"—that Frenchman—was to continue his activities as preacher. That is all. Why bother to inquire the right spelling of the man's name, and enter the name in the minutes? We seem to be reading about an unimportant resolution to give this foreign preacher a small salary. For the Town Council of Geneva did not believe it had done anything more than appoint a subordinate official who would perform his duties as obediently as any other minor official, an usher, for instance, or a sidesman, or an executioner.

It can hardly be said that the worthy councillors were men of learning. In their spare time they did not read theological works, and we cannot suppose for a moment that any one of them had even fluttered the pages of Calvin's *Institutio religionis Christianae*. Had they been scholars, they would certainly have been alarmed at the plenitude of powers assigned to "*iste Gallus*," to this French preacher, within the congregation: "Here may be specified the powers with which the preachers of the Church are to be equipped. Since they are appointed as administrators and proclaimers of the divine word, they must venture all things, and must be ready to compel the great and the mighty of this world to bow before the majesty of God and to serve Him. They have to hold sway over the highest and the lowest; they have to enforce God's will on earth and to destroy the realm of Satan, to safeguard the lambs and to extirpate the wolves; they have to exhort and to instruct the obedient, to accuse and to annihilate the refractory. They can bind and they can loose; they can wield lightnings and scatter thunders, but all in accordance with Holy Writ." These words of Calvin, "the preachers have to hold sway over the highest and the lowest," must unquestionably have been ignored by the members of the Town Council of Geneva, for had they marked the words, they would not have thrust unlimited power into the hands of a man who made such sweeping claims. Never suspecting that the French refugee whom they appointed preacher at their church, had determined from the outset to become lord of the city and State, they gave him office and salary and dignity. Thenceforward their own powers were at an end, for, thanks to his resistless energy, Calvin would grasp the reins, would ruthlessly realize his totalitarian ambitions, and thus transform a democratic republic into a theocratic dictatorship.



## CALVIN'S SEIZURE OF POWER

The initial steps taken by Calvin show his far-seeing logic and his clearly-thought-out aim. "When I first came into this church," he wrote subsequently, "the Reformation was at a standstill in Geneva. People preached there, and that was all. They got the images of the saints together and burnt them. But there was no Reformation worthy of the name. Everything was in disorder." Calvin was a born organizer, and detested disorder. His nature was mathematically precise, so that he was revolted by whatever was irregular and unsystematic. Any one who wishes to educate people to accept a new faith, must make them understand what they already believe and avow. They must be able to distinguish clearly between what is allowed and what is forbidden; every spiritual realm needs, no less than does every temporal realm, its visible boundaries and its laws. Within three months, Calvin submitted to this same Town Council a catechism all complete, for in its one-and-twenty articles the principles of the new evangelical doctrine were formulated in the most precise and comprehensible baldness; and this catechism, this Confession, which was to be, so to say, the decalogue of the new Church, was in principle accepted by the Council.

But Calvin was not a man to be satisfied by lukewarm acceptance. He insisted upon unreserved obedience down to the last punctuation mark. It was not enough for him that the doctrine should be formulated, since that might still leave the individual a certain amount of liberty to decide whether and to what extent he would comply. Calvin was not one who would ever tolerate freedom in respect of doctrine or of daily life. There was not to be a jot of give and take in religious and spiritual matters; there must be no truce with individual convictions; the Church, as he regarded it, had not merely the right but the duty to impose unquestioning obedience upon all men, to impose it by force, and to punish Laodiceanism



as savagely as it punished open resistance. "Others may think otherwise, but I do not myself believe our office to be confined within such narrow limits that, it may be supposed, when we have preached a sermon, we have done our duty to the full and may fold our arms and let things take their course." His catechism not merely laid down guiding lines for true believers, but formulated the laws of the State. He demanded of the Council that the burghers of the city of Geneva should be officially compelled to acknowledge their acceptance of this Confession publicly, by oath, one after another. By tens the burghers were to be brought before the elders, like schoolboys before a master, betaking themselves to the cathedral, and there, with uplifted hands, they were to swear unreserved acceptance of the catechism after it had been read aloud to them by the secretary of State. Any who should refuse to take the oath were immediately to be expelled from the town. This signified plainly and once for all that no burgher from that day on was to live within the walls of Geneva and venture in spiritual matters to diverge by a hair's breadth from the demands and views of Calvin. An end had been made in the canton of what had demanded the "Christian man's freedom" to regard religion as a matter for individual conscience. The logos had gained a victory over the ethos, the law over the spirit, of the Reformation. There was to be no more liberty in Geneva, now that Calvin had entered the city. One will was to rule all.

Dictatorship is unthinkable and untenable without force. Whoever wants to maintain power must have the instrument of power in his hands; he who wants to rule, must also have the right of inflicting punishment. Now the resolution to which Calvin owed his appointment did not give him any right to expel burghers from Geneva

for ecclesiastical offences. The councillors had appointed him "*lecteur de la Sainte Escripiture*" that he might interpret Holy Writ to the faithful; they had appointed him preacher that he might preach, and might guide the congregation to walk in the true faith. They considered that they had retained within their own hands the power of inflicting punishment, and that they, not Calvin or any preacher, were responsible for the behaviour of the burghers. Neither Luther nor Zwingli, nor any other of the reformers, had hitherto tried to take over such rights or powers, which were reserved to the civil authority. Calvin, being of an authoritarian nature, at once set to work to make the Council no more than the executive organ of his commands and ordinances. Since he had no legal right to do anything of the kind, he established a right for himself by introducing excommunication. By a stroke of genius he transformed the religious mystery of the Last Supper into a means for promoting his personal power and of exercising pressure on his adversaries. The Calvinist preacher, in due time, decided to admit those only to the Lord's Supper whose moral behaviour seemed satisfactory. But if the preacher refused to admit any one to the Lord's Supper, the person thus banned would be banned also in the civic sense. Here lay the intolerable might of the new weapon. No one was permitted any longer to speak of the offender, who was, as schoolboys say, sent to Coventry, no one could sell to him or buy from him; thus what had appeared at the outset to be a purely ecclesiastical instrument placed at the disposal of the spiritual authorities, was transformed into a social and business boycott. If the person against whom a boycott was declared would not capitulate, and refused to make public acknowledgment of wrongdoing, Calvin gave him short shrift, and commanded his banishment. An adversary of Calvin, though the most respectable of citizens, could no

longer, once he had fallen into Calvin's disfavour, go on living in Geneva. One who differed openly from the preacher had his very existence as a citizen destroyed.

These fearsome powers enabled Calvin to annihilate any who ventured to resist. With one bold stroke he took both thunder and lightning into his hands, acquiring unchallengeable supremacy such as the Bishop of Geneva had never wielded. For within the Catholic Church there was an endless hierarchy of authorities proceeding from lower to higher and the highest place. Many appeals could be made, before the Church definitively decided to expel one of its adherents. Excommunication was a supra-personal act, completely beyond the arbitrary power of an individual. But Calvin, having a clearer aim and being more ruthless in the exercise of his will-to-power, heedlessly forced this right of expulsion into the hands of the preachers and the Consistory. He made the terrible threat of excommunication a regular punishment, thus intensifying beyond bounds his personal power. Being a psychologist, he had calculated the effects of such a terror, and guessed the anxiety of those who had occasion to dread such a fate. With great labour the Town Council managed to secure the administration of holy communion only once a quarter, instead of, as Calvin demanded, once a month, but Calvin never allowed this strongest of weapons to be snatched from him, the weapon of excommunication and consequent expulsion. Only by the use of that weapon could he begin the struggle to which he had from the first looked forward, the struggle for totality of power.

A considerable time usually elapses before a nation perceives that the temporary advantages of dictatorship, of a rigid discipline with consequent increase in combative energy, must be paid for by the forfeiture of many in-



dividual rights ; and that inevitably the new law impinges upon ancient freedoms. In Geneva, as the years went by, this gradually became plain to the popular consciousness. The citizens gave their assent to the Reformation, voluntarily assembling in the market place as independent persons, to signify, by raising their hands, that they recognized the new faith. But their republican pride revolted against the supervision exercised by catchpoles. They strongly objected to being driven through the town like convicts, and compelled to swear obedience in the Church to every edict issued by My Lord Calvin. They had not approved a rigid moral reform in order that they might find themselves threatened with outlawry and exile merely for having uplifted their hearts in song when made merry by a glass of wine, or because they had worn clothes which seemed too bright of hue or too sumptuous to Master Calvin or Master Farel. People began to ask who were these fellows that assumed such commanding ways. Were they Genevese? Were they descendants of the old settlers, of those who had helped to create the greatness and the wealth of the city ; were they tried and trusted patriots, connected for centuries by blood or marriage with the best families? No, they were newcomers, refugees from France. They had been hospitably accepted, provided with maintenance, shelter, lucrative positions ; and now this tax-gatherer's son from a neighbouring country, having made a warm nest for himself, had sent for his brother and his brother-in-law, and he actually ventured to rail against and to browbeat burghers of standing. He, the French *émigré*, the man whom they had appointed to his new post, presumed to lay down the law as to who might and who might not live in Geneva !

In the early days of a dictatorship, before the free spirits have been clubbed into submission and other persons of independent mind have been expelled, the

forces of resistance hold their own for a while, and show a considerable amount of passion. So now in Geneva, persons with republican inclinations declared that they would not allow themselves to be treated "like pick-pockets." The inhabitants of whole streets, above all those of the Rue des Allemands, refused to take the oath. They murmured rebelliously, declaring that they would never obey the commands of a French starveling, would never at his beck and call leave their homes. Calvin did, indeed, succeed in inducing the Small Council, which was devoted to his cause, to support his decree of expulsion against those who refused to take the oath; but he did not as yet hazard the enforcement of so unpopular a measure, while the result of the new elections showed plainly that the majority of the burghers in Geneva were beginning to turn against Calvin's arbitrary decrees. In February, 1538, his immediate followers no longer commanded a majority in the Town Council, so that once more the democrats in Geneva were able to maintain their will against the authoritarian claims of Calvin.

Calvin ventured too far and too fast. Political ideologists are apt to underestimate the strength of mental inertia, fancying that decisive innovations can be established in the real world as quickly as within their own excogitations. Calvin found it necessary to go slow until he had won the secular authorities to his support. He adopted milder ways, for his position was insecure. All the same, the newly elected Council, while keeping a sharp eye on him, was not actively hostile. During this brief respite, even his most strenuous adversaries had to recognize that the groundwork of Calvin's fanaticism was an unconditional fervour for morality; that this impetuous man was not driven along his course by personal ambition, but by love of a great ideal. His comrade at



arms, Farel, was the idol of the young people and the mob, so that tension could easily be relaxed if Calvin consented to show a little diplomatic shrewdness, and adapted his revolutionary claims to the less extreme views of the burghers in general.

But here an obstacle was encountered in Calvin's granitic nature and iron rigidity. Throughout life, nothing could be further from this thoroughpaced zealot than a willingness for conciliation. He never understood the meaning of a middle course. For him there existed but one course—his own. All or nothing; he must have supreme authority or renounce his whole claim. Never would he compromise, being so absolutely convinced of the rightness of Jehan Calvin's standpoint that he simply could not conceive an opponent might believe in the rightness of another cause, and from a different point of view be as right as Master Calvin. It became an axiom for the latter that his business was to teach and other people's business was to learn. With perfect sincerity and imperturbable conviction, he announced: "I have from God what I teach, and herein my conscience fortifies me." Possessing terrific and sinister self-assurance, he compared his own views with absolute truth, and said: "*Dieu m'a fait la grâce de déclarer ce qu'est bon et mauvais*" (God has been gracious enough to reveal unto me good and evil). Yet again and again this man, who suffered from a sort of demoniacal possession by his own self, grew embittered and was genuinely outraged when another person with equal confidence maintained a contrary opinion. Dissent brought on in Calvin a nervous paroxysm. His mental sensibility affected the workings of his body. When he was crossed, his stomach revolted and he vomited bile. The antagonist might offer the most reasonable objections. That mattered nothing to Calvin, who was concerned only with the fact that another ventured to hold different views, and must con-



sequently be regarded as an enemy, not only of Jehan Calvin, but of the world at large, and of God Himself. "Hissing serpents," "barking dogs," "beasts," "rascals," "Satan's spawn"—such were the names showered in private life by this overwrought and arrogant man upon the leading humanists and theologians of his day. To differ from Calvin was to detract from "God's honour" in the person of His servant. Even if the difference was purely academic, the "Church of Christ was threatened" as soon as any one ventured to declare that the preacher of St. Pierre was dictatorially minded. So far as Calvin was concerned, what he meant by argument was that the other party to it must admit himself to have been wrong and must come over to Calvin's side. Throughout life this man, who in other respects showed clear-sightedness, was never able to doubt that he alone was competent to interpret the word of God, and that he alone possessed the truth. But thanks to this overweening self-confidence, thanks to this prophetic exaltation, to this superb monomania, Calvin was able to hold his own in actual life. It was to a petrified imperturbability, to an icy and inhuman rigidity, that he owed his victory on the political stage. Nothing but such an intoxication with the self, nothing but so colossally limited a self-satisfaction, makes a man a leader in the domain of universal history. People are prone to accept suggestions, not when it comes from the patient and the righteous, but from monomaniacs who proclaim their own truth as the only possible truth, and their own will as the basic formula of secular law.

Thus Calvin was not in the least shaken to find that the majority of the newly elected Town Council was adverse to him, politely requesting him to abstain, for the sake of the public peace, from his wild threats and excommunications, and to adopt the milder views of the Bernese synod. An obstinate mule like Calvin will not

accept an easy peace if it involves his conceding an iota. Compromise is impossible to such a man, and at the very time when the Town Council was contradicting him, he, who demanded from others absolute subordination to authority, would heedlessly rise in revolt against what for him should have represented constituted authority. From his pulpit he hurled invectives against the "Small Council," declaring "that he would rather die than fling the holy body of the Lord for dogs to devour." Another preacher declared in open church that the Town Council was "an assembly of topers." Thus Calvin's adherents formed a rigid block in their defiance of authority.

The Town Council could not tolerate so provocative a revolt. At first it was content to issue an unmistakable hint to the effect that the pulpit must not be used for political purposes, since the business of those who held forth in the pulpit was simply and solely to expound the word of God. But Calvin and his followers having disregarded this official instruction, the Council, as a last resort, forbade the preachers to enter the pulpit; and the most insubordinate of them, Courtauld, was arrested for his incitations to rebellion. This implied open war between the powers of the Church and the powers of the State. Calvin promptly took up the gauntlet. Attended by his supporters, he forced his way into the cathedral of St. Pierre, sturdily mounted the steps of the proscribed pulpit, and, since representatives of the parties began to crowd into the church sword in hand, one side determined to support the interdicted preacher, and the other side to prevent him from making himself heard, a riot ensued, so that the Easter celebrations very nearly ended in massacre.

Now the Town Council's patience was exhausted. The Great Council of the Two Hundred, the supreme authority, was summoned, and was asked to dismiss Calvin and the other preachers who defied the municipal

authorities. A general assembly of the citizens was summoned, and, by an overwhelming majority, on April 23, 1538, the rebel preachers were deprived of their positions and were ordered to leave the town within three days. A sentence of expulsion, of exile, which during the last eighteen months Calvin had fulminated against so many Genevese burghers, was now passed on himself.

Calvin's first attempt to take Geneva by storm failed. But in the life of a dictator reverses are of small moment. Indeed, it is almost essential that the ascent to a position which will give such a man uncontrolled power, should be marked at the outset by dramatic defeat. For arch-revolutionists, exile, imprisonment, outlawry, have never been hindrances to their popularity, but helps. One who is to be idolized by the masses must first have been a martyr. Persecution by a detested system can alone create for a leader of the people the psychological prerequisites of subsequent whole-hearted support by the masses. The more a would-be leader is tested, the more is the populace likely to regard him as mystically appointed. Nothing is so essential to the role of a leading politician as that he should pass into the background, for temporary invisibility makes his figure legendary. Fame envelops his personality in a luminous cloud, an aureole of glory; and when he emerges from it, he is able to fulfil expectations which have been multiplied a hundredfold, in an atmosphere which has formed without his stirring a finger on its behalf. It was in exile that many remarkable persons acquired an authority that is wielded only by those who have won affection and inspired confidence. Cæsar in Gaul, Napoleon in Egypt, Garibaldi in South America, Lenin in the Urals, became stronger through absence than they would have been had they remained present. So was it, too, with Calvin.



Granted that, in the hour of expulsion, it seemed as if all was up with Jehan Calvin. His organization destroyed, his work shattered, there remained nothing but the memory of a fanatical will to impose order, and a few dozen trustworthy friends. He was helped, however, like all those whose disposition leads them to eschew compromise and to withdraw into obscurity at dangerous times, by the errors alike of his successors and of his opponents. When Calvin and Farel, persons of impressive personality, had been cashiered, the municipal authorities found it difficult to shark up one or two servile preachers, who, fearing that resolute action on their part might make them unpopular, were readier to slacken the reins than to draw them tighter. With such men in the pulpit, the Reformation in Geneva, which had been so energetically undertaken by Calvin, soon came to a standstill, and the burghers were confused as to what was right and what was wrong in matters of faith, so that the members of the prohibited Catholic Church gradually regained courage, and endeavoured, through shrewd intermediaries, to reconquer Geneva for the Roman faith. The situation was critical, and steadily became more so. By degrees, the reformers who had thought Calvin too harsh and too strict, became uneasy, and asked themselves whether an iron discipline was not, after all, more desirable than imminent chaos. More and more of the burghers, among them some of those who had actively opposed Calvin, now urged his recall, and the municipal authorities could at length see no other course than to comply with the popular will. The first messages and letters to Calvin were no more than cautious inquiries; but soon they plainly and urgently expressed a desire for the preacher's return. The invitation was intensified into a passionate appeal. The Town Council no longer wrote to "Monsieur" Calvin asking him to come back and help the town out of its difficulties,

but addressed its communications to "Maître" Calvin. At length the subservient and perplexed councillors wrote imploring "their good brother and sometime friend" to resume his office as preacher, those who penned this missive declaring themselves "determined to behave towards him in such a way that he would have reason to be satisfied."

Had Calvin been petty, and had a cheap triumph been enough for him, he certainly might have felt satisfied at being besought to return to the city which two years ago had expelled him. But one who craves all will never put up with half-measures; and, in this sacred cause, Calvin was not moved by personal vanity, he wanted to establish the victory of authority—his own authority. Not a second time was he willing to allow his work to be interfered with by any secular power. If he returned to Geneva, only one writ must run there, the writ of Jehan Calvin.

Not until Geneva came to him with fettered hands, with a humble and binding declaration of willingness to "subordinate" itself, would Calvin consider the negotiations to be on a satisfactory footing. With a disdain which he exaggerated for tactical reasons, he rejected these urgent offers. "A hundred times rather would I go to my death than resume the distressful struggles of earlier days," he wrote to Farel. He would not move a step towards his exponents. When at length the municipal authorities, metaphorically speaking, kneeled before Calvin, beseeching him to come back, his closest friend Farel grew impatient and wrote: "Are you going to wait until the stones cry out for your return?" But Calvin stood to his guns until Geneva unconditionally surrendered. Not till the councillors swore to accept the Confession and to establish the requisite "discipline" in accordance with his will, not till they sent letters to the town of Strasburg asking their brethren in that city to

spare them this indispensable man, not till Geneva had humiliated itself before the world at large as well as before himself, did Calvin give way and declare himself ready to assume his old office, providing he were given plenary powers.

As a vanquished city makes ready for the entrance of the conqueror, so did Geneva prepare to receive Jehan Calvin. Everything possible was done to allay his displeasure. The old and strict edicts were hastily reimposed, that Calvin's demands might be conceded in advance. The Small Council found a suitable house with a garden for the man whose presence was now so greatly desired, and furnished it handsomely. The pulpit in the cathedral of St. Pierre was reconstructed, so that he could preach more effectively, and so that his person should be visible to every member of the congregation. Honour was heaped upon honour. Before Calvin left Strasburg, a herald was despatched from Geneva to meet him half-way on his journey with greetings from the city; and his family was ceremoniously fetched at the cost of the burghers. At length, on September 13th, a travelling carriage approached the Cornavin Gate. Huge crowds assembled to lead the returned exile into the city amid great rejoicings. Now Geneva was in his hands, to mould as a potter moulds clay; and he would not desist from his task until he had transformed the town to his own way of thinking. From that hour, Calvin and Geneva became two inseparable ideas, Calvin and Geneva, spirit and form, the creator and the creature.



## *Chapter 2*

### THE "DISCIPLINE"

ONE of the most momentous experiments of all time began when this lean and harsh man entered the Cornavin Gate. A State was to be converted into a rigid mechanism; innumerable souls, people with countless feelings and thoughts, were to be compacted into an all-embracing and unique system. This was the first attempt made in Europe to impose, in the name of an idea, a uniform subordination upon an entire populace. With systematic thoroughness, Calvin set to work upon the realization of his plan to convert Geneva into the first Kingdom of God on Earth. It was to be a community without taint, without corruption, disorder, vice, or sin; it was to be the New Jerusalem, a centre from which the salvation of the world would radiate. This one and only idea was to embody Calvin's life; and the whole of his life was to be devoted to service of this one idea. The iron ideologist took his sublime utopia most seriously, most sacredly; and never during the quarter of a century throughout which his spiritual dictatorship lasted, did Calvin doubt that he was conferring immense benefits upon his fellow men when he asked them to live "rightly," which to him meant that they should live in accordance with the will and the prescriptions of God.

At first sight this may seem simple enough. But on closer examination, doubts arise. How is the will of God to be recognized? Where are His instructions to be found? In the gospels, answered Calvin; there, and there only. In Holy Writ, which is eternal, God's will and

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God's word live and breathe. These sacred writings have not been preserved for us by chance. God expressly transformed tradition into scripture, that His commandments might be plainly recognizable, and be taken to heart by men. This evangel existed before the Church and was superior to the Church; and there was no other truth outside or beyond ("*en dehors et au delà*"). Consequently, in a truly Christian State, God's word, "*la parole de Dieu*," was the supreme expression of morality, thought, faith, law, and life; the Bible, as a book, embodied all wisdom, all justice, all truth. For Calvin, the Bible was the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. All decisions in all matters must be based upon its texts.

By thus making the written word the supreme authority of mundane behaviour, Calvin seemed to be repeating the well-known primal demand of the Reformation. In reality he was making a huge step beyond the Reformation, and was breaking wholly away from its original circle of ideas. For the Reformation began as a movement to secure peace in spiritual and religious matters. It purposed to lay the gospels in every man's hands without restriction. Instead of the pope in Rome and the Councils of the Church, individual conviction was to shape Christianity. This "*Freiheit des Christenmenschen*" (freedom of the Christian man) inaugurated by Luther was, however, together with every other form of spiritual freedom, ruthlessly torn away from his fellow mortals by Calvin. To him, the word of the Lord was absolutely clear; and he therefore decreed that interpretations of God's word or glosses upon the divine teachings other than his own were inadmissible. As stone pillars support the roof of a cathedral, so must the words of the Bible sustain the Church that she may for ever remain stable. The word of God would no longer function as the *logos spermatikos*, as the eternally creative and trans-

formative truth, but merely as truth interpreted once and for all by the ecclesiastical law of Geneva.

Calvin thus inaugurated a Protestant orthodoxy in place of a papistical one; and with perfect justice this new form of dogmatic dictatorship has been stigmatized as bibliocracy. One book was henceforward lord and judge in Geneva. God the legislator, and His preacher who was the sole authoritative interpreter of divine law, were judges in the sense of the Mosaic dispensation; were judges over the kings and over the people; were equipped with a power which it was sinful to resist. None but the interpretations of the Consistory were valid; they, and not decrees of the Town Council, were to be the bases of legislation in Geneva. They alone could decide what was allowed and what was forbidden; and woe unto him who should venture to challenge their ruling. One who denied the validity of the priestly dictatorship was a rebel against God; and the commentary on Holy Writ would soon be written in blood. A reign of force which originates out of a movement towards liberty, is always more strenuously opposed to the idea of liberty than is a hereditary power. Those who owe their position as governors to a successful revolution, become the most obscurantist and intolerant opponents of further innovation.

All dictatorships begin with the attempt to realize an ideal, but an ideal takes form and colour from the persons who endeavour to realize it. Inevitably, therefore, Calvin's doctrine, being a spiritual creation, bore a physiognomical resemblance to its creator; and one need merely glance at his countenance to foresee that this doctrine would be harsher, more morose and oppressive, than any previous exegesis of Christianity. Calvin's face resembled the Karst, was like one of those lonely, remote,



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rocky landscapes which may wear the expression of divinity, but about which there is nothing human. Whatever makes our life fruitful, joyful, flowerlike, warm, and sensual (in the good meaning of that misused term), is lacking to this unkind, unsociable, timeless visage of the ascetic. Calvin's long, oval face is harsh and ugly, angular, gloomy, and inharmonious. The forehead is narrow and severe above deep-set eyes which glimmer like hot coals; the hooked nose masterfully projects from between sunken cheeks; the thin-lipped mouth makes a transverse slit in the face, a mouth which rarely smiles. There is no warm flush upon the wasted, ashen-hued skin. It seems as if fever must, like a vampire, have sucked the blood out of the cheeks, so grey are they and wan, except when, in fleeting seconds, under stress of anger, they become hectic. Vainly does the prophet's beard (and all Calvin's disciples and priests did their best to follow the fashion set by their master) strive to give this bilious countenance the semblance of virile energy. The sparse hairs, like the skin of the face to which they are attached, have no sap in them; they do not flow majestically downwards, like the beard of Moses in the old paintings, but sprout thinly, a mournful thicket growing on ungrateful soil.

A dark and cheerless, a lonely and tensed face! It is hardly credible that any one should want to have the picture of this grasping and hortatory zealot hanging upon the walls of his private rooms. One's breath would grow cold if one were continually to feel these alert and spying eyes fixed upon one in all one's daily doings. No store of individual cheerfulness could stand up against it. Zurbaran would probably have best succeeded in portraying Calvin, in the same style of Spanish fanaticism as that in which he represented the ascetics and the anchorites, dark upon a dark background; men who dwelt in caves far from the world, for ever looking at the

Book, with, as other implements of their spiritual life, the death's-head and the Cross; men plunged into a chill, black, unapproachable loneliness. Throughout life, Calvin was guarded by this respect for human unapproachability. From earliest youth he wore sable raiment. Black was the biretta which crowned the low forehead; this headdress being half-way between the hood of a monk and the helmet of a soldier. Black was the flowing cassock, which reached to the shoes; the robe of a judge whose business it is to punish men unceasingly; the gown of the physician, who must ever be trying to heal sins and ulcers. Black, always black; always the colour of seriousness, death, and pitilessness. Never did Calvin present himself in any other guise than that symbolic of his office; for he wished to be seen and dreaded by others in no other representation than that of God's servant, in the vesture of duty. He had no desire that others should love him as a man and a brother.

But if he was harsh to the world, he was no less harsh to himself, keeping the strictest discipline; allowing to the body, for the sake of the spirit, no more than the absolute minimum of food and rest. His night's sleep lasted for three hours, or four at most; he ate one frugal meal a day, hurriedly, an open book before him. He took no walk for pleasure, played no games of any kind, sought no form of relaxation, shunning, above all, those things he might genuinely have enjoyed. He worked, thought, wrote, laboured, and fought, in splendid devotion to the spirit; but never for an hour did he live his own private life.

Calvin never knew what it was to enjoy youth, he was, so to say, born adult; another and fundamental characteristic was his total lack of sensuality. The latter quality was a grave danger to his doctrinal teaching. The other reformers believed and declared that man could serve the divine purpose faithfully by gratefully accepting



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God's gifts; essentially healthy and normal, they delighted in their health and in their power of enjoyment; Zwingli left an illegitimate child behind him in his first parish; Luther once said laughingly, "If the wife does not want it, the maid does"—one and all, they were men ready to drink deep and to laugh heartily. In contrast, Calvin completely suppressed the sensual elements in his nature, or allowed them to appear only in the most shadowy fashion. Fanatically intellectual, he lived wholly in the word and in the spirit. Truth was only truth to him when it was logical and clear and consistent. He understood and tolerated the orderly alone, detested the disorderly. Bigotedly sober, he never asked or derived pleasure from anything which can make a man drunken; wine, woman, art, or God's other jolly gifts to earth. The only time in his life when, to comply with the prescriptions in the Bible, he went a-wooing, he was not impelled by passion, but by the conviction that as a married man he would probably do better work. Instead of looking around and making his own choice, Calvin commissioned his friends to find him a suitable spouse, with the result that this fierce enemy of the sensual narrowly missed becoming contracted to a light woman. At length, in his disillusionment, he married the widow of an Anabaptist whom he had converted; but fate denied him the capacity for being happy. The only child his wife bore him was unviable. It died within a few days; and when, soon afterwards, his wife left him a widower, though he was no more than thirty-six, with twenty years of a man's prime to live, he had done with marriage and with women. He never touched another woman, devoting himself wholly to the spiritual, the clerical, the doctrinal.

Nevertheless a man's body makes its claims no less than does the mind, and takes a cruel revenge on him who neglects it. Every organ in our mortal frame utters an instinctive demand for a full use of its natural



capacities. From time to time the blood needs to circulate more freely, the heart to beat more forcibly, the lungs to expand, the muscles to bestir themselves, the semen to find its natural destination; and he who continually encourages his intellect to suppress these vital wills, and fights against their satisfaction, is faced sooner or later by a revolt of the organs. Terrible was the reckoning which Calvin's body exacted from its disciplinarian. The nerves of the ascetic who tries to pretend or to persuade himself that they do not exist, emphasize their reality by perpetually tormenting the despot; and perhaps few masters of the spiritual life have suffered more distresses than did Calvin, because of the revolt of the flesh. One indisposition followed hard upon another. In almost every letter from Calvin's pen we read of some mischievous surprise-attack by an enigmatic malady. Now he talks of migraines, which keep him in bed for days; then of stomach-ache, headache, inflamed piles, colics, severe colds, nervous spasms, hæmorrhages, gallstones, carbuncles, transient fever, rigors, rheumatism, bladder trouble. He was continually having to call in the doctor; his body seemed so frail that every part of it was liable to give way under strain, and to become a centre of revolt. With a groan, Calvin once wrote: "My health resembles a long-drawn-out dying."

But this man had taken as his motto, "*per mediam desperationem prorumpere convenit*" (to fight his way with renewed energy out of the depths of despair); and he refused to allow his indispositions to rob him of a single hour of labour. This turbulent body was to be perpetually resubjugated by his domineering spirit. If fever ran so high as to prevent his crawling to the pulpit, he would have himself carried to church in a litter, and preach notwithstanding. When he could not attend a sitting of the Town Council, he would summon the members to meet in his own house. If he were lying in

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bed, with chattering teeth and covered by four or five heated quilts, trying to arouse a sense of warmth in his poor shivering body, he would still have in the room two or three secretaries, and would dictate to each by turns. If he went to spend a day with a friend in the nearby countryside, in search of change of air, his famuli would drive thither in his carriage; and hardly had the party arrived when trains of messengers would be hasting to the city and back again. After each spell of illness he would seize the pen once more and resume his life of toil.

We cannot conceive of Calvin as inactive. He was a demon of industry, working without a pause. When other houses were still fast asleep, long before dawn the lamp would already be lighted in his study; and would go on burning for hours after midnight, when all the rest of Geneva had sought repose. But to those who looked up at his window towards sun-down and sun-up, it seemed as if this lonely lamp were ever burning. The amount of work he turned out was incredible, so that we cannot but think he must have kept four or five brains simultaneously engaged. It is no exaggeration to say that this confirmed invalid did actually do the work belonging to four or five different professions. His basic office, that of preacher at the cathedral of St. Pierre, was only one office among many which this pluralist, animated by an hysterical will-to-power, gradually got possession of; and although the sermons he delivered in the aforesaid cathedral filled, as printed volumes, a bookshelf, and although a copyist found his time fully occupied in transcribing them, they are but a small fraction of his collected writings. As chairman of the Consistory, which never came to a decision without his pulling the strings; as compiler of countless theological and polemic treatises; as translator of the Bible; as founder of the university and initiator of the theological seminary; as perpetual adviser of the Town Council; as

political general-staff officer in the wars of religion; as supreme diplomat and organizer of Protestantism—this “Minister of Holy Writ” guided and conducted all the other ministries of his theocratic State. He supervised the reports of the preachers that came to hand from France, Scotland, England, and Holland; he directed propaganda in foreign parts; through book-printers and book-distributors, he established a secret service which extended its tentacles over the whole world. He carried on discussions with other Protestant leaders and negotiations with princes and diplomats. Daily, almost hourly, visitors arrived from foreign parts. No student, no budding theologian, could pass through Geneva without seeking Calvin’s advice and paying his respects. His house was like a post office, a permanent source of information, as regards political and private affairs. With a sigh, he once wrote to a friend saying that he could not recall ever having had two consecutive hours during his official career to devote without interruption to his work.

From the most distant lands such as Hungary and Poland, there daily poured in despatches from his confidential agents, and he had to give personal advice to countless persons who applied to him for help. Now it was a refugee who wanted to settle in Geneva and arrange for his family to join him there. Calvin sent round the hat, and made sure that his co-religionist should secure welcome and support. Now it was some one who wanted to get married, now another who wanted to get divorced; both paths led to Calvin, for no spiritual event could occur in Geneva without his approval. If only lust for autocracy had been confined to its proper sphere, to the things of the spirit! Calvin, however, recognized no limit to his power, for, as a theocrat, he considered that everything mundane must be subordinated to the divine and the spiritual. Fiercely he laid his overbearing hand upon everything in the city



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and in the State. There is hardly a day, in the records of the sittings of the Town Council, in which we do not find the remark: "Better consult Maître Calvin about this." Nothing could escape his watchful eyes; and even though we cannot but regard the incessant labours of this active brain as miraculous, such an asceticism of the spirit brings with it perils innumerable. Whoever completely renounces personal enjoyment, will, voluntary though his renunciation be, come to regard renunciation as a law to be imposed upon others, and will try to impose by force upon others what is natural to him but unnatural to them. Take Robespierre as an example; the ascetic is always the most dangerous kind of despot. One who does not share fully and joyfully in the life of his fellows will grow inexorable towards them.

Discipline and unsympathetic severity are the fundamentals of Calvinist doctrine. In Calvin's view man has no right, holding up his head and glancing frankly in all directions, to march undaunted through the world. He must always remain in the shadow of "the fear of the Lord", humbly bowing before the conviction of his hopeless inadequacy. From the outset, Calvin's puritanical morality led him to regard cheerful and unconstrained enjoyment as "sinful". Everything which can bring adornment and give impetus to our earthly existence, everything which can happily release the soul of its tensions, which can uplift, enfranchise, and relieve us of our burdens, is condemned by the Calvinist code as vain, void, and superfluous. Before all, these harsh judgments attach to art. Even in the religious realm, which has for ages been intimately associated with mysticism and ritual, Calvin enforces his own ideological matter-of-factness. Without exception, everything which can interest the senses, or can make the feelings pliable and uncertain, is swept ruthlessly aside; for the true believer must not approach the Throne with the strongly moved soul

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of an artist, clouded by the sweet aroma of incense, befooled by music, led astray by the beauty of what are wrongfully supposed to be pious pictures and sculptures.

Only when perfectly clear, is the truth the truth. God's word can rarely be God's word unless it is absolutely plain. Away, then, with idolatry! Throw pictures and statues out of the churches. Away with coloured vestments. Free the Lord's Table from mass-books and gilded tabernacles. God has no need of the ornate. Away with wanton junketings which numb the spirit: let no music, no sonorous organ play during divine service. Even the church bells, thenceforward, had to be still in Geneva, for the true believer does not need to be reminded of his duty by the clang of metal. Piety is never preserved by things external to the spirit; never by sacrifices and spendings; but only by inward obedience. Clear out elaborate ceremony from the church; clear out emblems and ritual practices. Make an end of feasts and festivals. With one stroke, Calvin erased fête-days from the calendar. The celebration of Easter and Christmas, begun by the early Christians in the Roman catacombs, was abolished in Geneva. Saints' days were no longer recognized. All the old-established customs of the Church were prohibited. Calvin's God did not want to be celebrated, or even to be loved, but only to be feared.

It was presumptuous for man to try and draw nearer to God through ecstasy or uplifting of the spirit, instead of serving from afar with perpetual veneration. Herein lay the deepest significance of the Calvinist revaluation of values. Wishing to elevate the divine as high as possible above the world, Calvin threw the worldly down into the lowest depths. Wishing to give supreme dignity to the idea of God, he degraded the idea of man. The misanthropic reformer regarded mankind as an undisciplined rabble, a rout of sinners; and he never ceased to contemplate with horror and detestation the perpetually



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swelling current of mundane pleasures which life brings from a thousand sources to persons of less ascetic temperament. How incomprehensible has been God's decision, Calvin groans again and again, to create His creatures so imperfect and immoral, perpetually inclined towards vice and sin, incapable of recognizing the divine, and impatient to plunge once again in the deep waters of sin. Disgust seizes him when he contemplates his brothers in the faith. Never perhaps has a great founder of a religion used such degrading terms in his description of mankind: "*bête indomptable et féroce*," and, yet worse, "*une ordure*." Again, in his *Institutio*: "If we contemplate man only in respect of his natural gifts, we find in him, from the crown of his head to the sole of his feet, no trace whatever of goodness. Whatever in him is a little praiseworthy, comes from the grace of God. . . . All our justice is injustice; our service, filth; our glory, shame. Even the best things that rise out of us are always made infect and vicious by the uncleanness of the flesh, and are always mingled with dirt."

Obviously one who, from the philosophic standpoint, regards man as an unsuccessful and abortive piece of workmanship on God's part, will never be willing, as theologian and statesman, to concede that God can have given such a creature a jot of liberty or independence. Ruthlessly, the Almighty must deprive this corrupt and greedy creature of the right of self-determination, for "if we leave man to his own devices, his soul is capable of naught but evil." Once for all, we must rebuke the spawn of Adam for the presumptuous notion that they have any right to develop their relationship to God and to the world here below in accordance with their own personality; and the more harshly we repress such presumption, the more we subordinate and bridle man, the better for him. No liberty, no freedom of the will, for man could only misuse such privileges. He must forcibly



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humble himself before the greatness of God. We must render him sober, we must frighten him, rebuking his presumption, until he unresistingly accepts his position in the pious and obedient herd, until he has merged in that herd all that is individual within him, so that the individual, the extraordinary, vanishes without leaving a trace.

To achieve this draconian suppression of personality, to achieve this vandal expropriation of the individual in favour of the community, Calvin had a method all his own, the famous Church "discipline." A harsher curb upon human impulses and desires has hardly been devised by and imposed upon man down to our own days. From the first hour of his dictatorship, this brilliant organizer herded his flock, his congregation, within a barbed-wire entanglement of paragraphs and prohibitions, the so-called "Ordinances"; simultaneously creating a special department to supervise the working of terrorist morality. The organization of which we have just spoken was called the Consistory, its purpose being defined, ambiguously enough, as that of supervising the congregation or the community "that God may be honoured in all purity." Only to outward seeming was the sphere of influence of this moral inspectorate restricted to the religious life. For, owing to the intimate association of the secular or mundane with the philosophical in Calvin's totalitarian conception of the State, the vestiges of independence were henceforward to come automatically under the control of the authorities. The catchpoles of the Consistory, the "*anciens*," were expressly instructed to keep watch upon the private life of every one in Geneva. Their watchfulness must never be relaxed, and they were expected to pay attention, "not only to the uttered word, but also to opinions and view."

From the days when so universal a control of private

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life was instituted, private life could hardly be said to exist any longer in Geneva. With one leap, Calvin outdistanced the Catholic Inquisition, which had always waited for reports of informers or denunciations from other sources before sending out its familiars and its spies. In Geneva, however, in accordance with Calvin's religious philosophy, every human being was primarily and perpetually inclined to evil rather than to good, was *a priori* suspect as a sinner, so every one must put up with supervision. After Calvin's return to Geneva, it was as if the doors of the houses had suddenly been thrown open and as if the walls had been transformed into glass. From moment to moment, by day and by night, there might come a knocking at the entry, and a number of "spiritual police" announce a "visitation" without the citizen concerned being able to offer resistance. Once a month, rich and poor, the powerful and the weak, had to submit to the questioning of these professional "*police des mœurs*." For hours (since the ordinances declared that such examination must be done in leisurely fashion), white-haired, respectable, tried, and hitherto trusted men, must be examined like schoolboys as to whether they knew the prayers by heart, or as to why they had failed to attend one of Master Calvin's sermons. But with such catechizing and moralizing, the visitation was by no means at an end. The members of this moral Cheka thrust fingers into every pie. They felt the women's dresses to see whether their skirts were not too long or too short, whether these garments had superfluous frills or dangerous slits. The police carefully inspected the coiffure, to see that it did not tower too high; they counted the rings on the victim's fingers, and looked to see how many pairs of shoes there were in the cupboard. From the bedroom they passed on to the kitchen table, to ascertain whether the prescribed diet was not being exceeded by a soup or a course of meat, or whether sweets

and jams were hidden away somewhere. Then the pious policeman would continue his examination of the rest of the house. He pried into bookshelves, on the chance of there being a book devoid of the Consistory's *imprimatur*; he looked into drawers on the chance of finding the image of one of the saints, or a rosary. The servants were asked about the behaviour of their masters, and the children were cross-questioned as to the doings of their parents.

As he walked along the street, this minion of the Calvinist dictatorship would keep his ears pricked to ascertain whether any one was singing a secular song, or was making music, or was addicted to the diabolic vice of cheerfulness. For henceforward in Geneva the authorities were always on the hunt for anything that smacked of pleasure, for any "paillardise," and woe unto a burgher caught visiting a tavern when the day's work was over to refresh himself with a glass of wine, or unto another who was so depraved as to find pleasure in dice or cards. Day after day the hunt went on, nor could the overworked spies enjoy rest on the Sabbath. Once more they would make a house-to-house visitation where some slothful wretch was lying in bed instead of seeking edification from Master Calvin's sermon. In the church another informer was on the watch, ready to denounce any one who should enter the house of God too late or leave it too early. These official guardians of morality were at work everywhere indefatigably. When night fell, they pried among the bushes beside the Rhone, to see if a sinful pair might be indulging in caresses; while in the inns they scrutinized the beds and ransacked the baggage of strangers. They opened every letter which entered or left the city; and the carefully organized watchfulness of the Consistory extended far beyond the walls of the city. In the diligence, in public rowing boats, in ships crossing the lake for the foreign market, and in the inns beyond the town limits, spies were every-



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where at work. Any word of discontent uttered by a Genevese citizen who might be visiting Lyons or Paris, would infallibly be reported. But what made the situation yet more intolerable was that countless unofficial spies joined their activities as volunteers to those who were properly appointed to the task. Whenever a State inaugurates a reign of terror, the poisonous plant of voluntary denunciation flourishes like a loathsome weed; when it is agreed on principle that denunciations shall be tolerated and are even desirable, otherwise decent folk are driven by fear to play the part of informer. If it were only to divert suspicion "of being on the side of the devil instead of God", every Genevese citizen in the days of Calvin's dictatorship looked askance at his fellows. The "*zelo della paura*," the zeal of dread, ran impatiently ahead of the informers. After some years, the Consistory was able to abolish official supervision, since all the citizens had become voluntary controllers. The restless current of denunciations streamed in by day and by night, and kept the mill wheel of the spiritual Inquisition turning briskly.

Who could feel safe under such a system, could be sure that he was not breaking one of the commandments, since Calvin forbade practically everything which might have made life joyful and worth while? Prohibited were theatres, amusements, popular festivals, any kind of dancing or playing. Even so innocent a sport as skating stirred Calvin's bile. The only tolerated attire was sober and almost monkish. The tailors, therefore, were forbidden, unless they had special permission from the town authorities, to cut in accordance with new fashions. Girls were forbidden to wear silk before they reached the age of fifteen years; above that age, they were not allowed to wear velvet. Gold and silver lace, golden hair, needless buttons and furbelows, were equally under the ban, and the wearing of gold ornaments or other trinkets was

against the regulations. Men were not allowed to wear their hair long; women were forbidden to make much of their tresses by curling them, and training them over combs. Lace was forbidden; gloves were forbidden; frills and slashed shoes were forbidden. Forbidden was the use of litters and of wheeled carriages. Forbidden were family feasts to which more than twenty persons had been invited; at baptisms and betrothal parties, there must not be more than a specified number of courses, and sweets or candied fruits must not be served. No other wine than the red wine of the region might be drunk, while game, whether four footed or winged, and pastry, were prohibited. Married folk were not allowed to give one another presents at the wedding, or for six months afterwards. Of course, any sort of extra-conjugal intercourse was absolutely forbidden; and there must be no laxity in this respect even among people who had been formally engaged.

The citizens of Geneva were not allowed to enter an inn and the host of such a place must not serve a stranger with food and drink until the latter had said his prayers. In general, the tavern-keepers were instructed to spy upon their guests, paying diligent heed to every suspicious word or gesture. No book might be printed without a special permit. It was forbidden to write letters abroad. Images of the saints, other sculptures, and music were forbidden. Even as regards psalm-singing, the ordinances declared that "care must be taken" to avoid allowing attention to wander to the tune, instead of concentrating it upon the spirit and the meaning of the words: for "only in the living word may God be praised." The citizens, who before Calvin's coming had regarded themselves as free burghers, were now not even allowed to choose the baptismal names of their children. Although for hundreds of years the names of Claude and Amadé had been popular, they were now

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prohibited because they did not occur in the Bible. A pious Genevese must name his son Isaac, Adam, or the like. It was forbidden to say the Lord's Prayer in Latin, forbidden to keep the feasts of Easter and Christmas. Everything was forbidden which might have relieved the grey monotony of existence; and forbidden, of course, was any trace of mental freedom in the matter of the printed or spoken word. Forbidden as the crime of crimes was any criticism of Calvin's dictatorship; and the town crier, preceded by drummers, solemnly warned the burghers that "there must be no discussion of public affairs except in the presence of the Town Council."

Forbidden, forbidden, forbidden: what a detestable rhythm! In amazement one asks oneself, what, after so many prohibitions, was left to the Genevese as permissible. Not much. It was permissible to live and to die, to work and to obey, and to go to church. This last, indeed, was not merely permitted, but enforced under pain of severe punishment in case of absence. Woe unto the burgher who should fail to hear the sermons preached in the parish to which he belonged; two on Sunday, three in the course of the week, and the special hour of edification for children. The yoke of coercion was not lifted even on the Lord's Day, when the round of duty, duty, duty, was inexorable. After hard toil to gain daily bread throughout the week, came the day when all service must be devoted to God. The week for labour, Sunday for church. Thus Satan would be unable to gain or keep a footing even in sinful man; and thus an end would be put to liberty and the joy of life.

But how, we ask in amazement, could a republican city, accustomed for decades to Swiss freedom, tolerate a dictatorship as rigid as had been Savonarola's in Florence; how could a southern people, fundamentally



cheerful, endure such a throttling of the joy of life? Why was an ascetic like Calvin empowered to sweep away joy from thousands upon thousands? Calvin's secret was not a new one; his art was that which all dictators before and since have used. Terror. Calvin's was a Holy Terror. Do not let us mince matters: force that sticks at nothing, making mock of humaneness as the outcome of weakness, soon becomes overwhelming. A systematic despotically imposed reign of terror, paralyses the will of the individual, making community life impossible. Like a consuming disease, it eats into the soul; and soon, this being the heart of the mystery, universal cowardice gives the dictator helpers everywhere; for, since each man knows himself to be under suspicion, he suspects his neighbours; and, in a panic, the zealots outrun the commands and prohibitions of their tyrant.

An organized reign of terror never fails to work miracles; and when his authority was challenged, Calvin did not hesitate to work this miracle again and again. Few if any other despots have outdone him in this respect; and it is no excuse to say that his despotism, like all his qualities, was a logical product of his ideology. Agreed, this man of the spirit, this man of the nerves, this intellect, had a hatred of bloodshed. Being, as he himself openly admitted, unable to endure the sight of cruelty, he never attended one of the executions and burnings which were so frequent in Geneva during the days of his rule. But herein lies the gravest fault of fervent ideologists. Men of this type, who (once more like Robespierre) would never have the pluck to witness an execution, and still less to carry it out with their own hands, will heedlessly order hundreds or thousands of death sentences as soon as they feel themselves covered by their "Idea," their theory, their system. Now Calvin regarded harshness towards "sinners" as the key-stone of his system; and to carry this system unremittingly

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into effect was for him, from his philosophical outlook, a duty imposed on him by God. That was why, in defiance of the promptings of his own nature, he had to quench any inclination to be pitiful and to train himself systematically in cruelty. He "exercised" himself in unyieldingness as if it had been a fine art.

"I train myself in strictness that I may fight the better against universal wrongdoing." We cannot deny that this man of iron will was terribly successful in his self-discipline to make himself unkind. He frankly admitted that he would rather know that an innocent man had been punished, than that one sinner should escape God's judgment. When, among the numerous executions, one was prolonged into an abominable torture by the clumsiness of the executioner, Calvin wrote an exculpatory letter to Farel: "It cannot have happened without the peculiar will of God that the condemned persons were forced to endure such a prolongation of their torments." It is better to be too harsh than too gentle, if "God's honour" is concerned—such was Calvin's argument. Nothing but unsparing punishment can make human behaviour moral.

It is easy to understand how murderous must be the effects of such a thesis of the pitiless Christ, and of a God whose honour had perpetually to be "protected." What was the upshot likely to be in a world that had not yet escaped from the Middle Ages? During the first five years of Calvin's rule, in this town which had a comparatively small population, thirteen persons were hanged, ten decapitated, five-and-thirty burned; while seventy-six persons were driven from their houses and homes—to say nothing of those who ran away in time to avoid the operations of the terror. So crowded were the prisons in the "New Jerusalem" that the head gaoler informed the magistrates he could not find accommodation for any more prisoners. So horrible was the martyr-

dom not only of condemned persons but also of suspects, that the accused laid violent hands upon themselves rather than enter the torture chambers. At length the Council had to issue a decree to the effect that "in order to reduce the number of such incidents, the prisoners should wear handcuffs day and night." Calvin uttered no word against these abominations. Terrible was the price which the city had to pay for the establishment of such "order" and "discipline"; for never before had Geneva known so many death sentences, punishments, rackings, and exilings, as now when Calvin ruled there in the name of God. Balzac, therefore, is right when he declares the religious terrorism of Calvin to have been even more abominable than the worst blood-orgies of the French Revolution. "Calvin's rabid religious intolerance was morally crueller than Robespierre's political intolerance; and if he had had a more extensive sphere of influence than Geneva, he would have shed more blood than the dread apostle of political equality."

All the same, it was not by means mainly of these barbarous sentences and executions and tortures that Calvin broke the Genevese sentiment of liberty; but, rather, by systematized petty tyranny and daily intimidation. At the first glance we are inclined to be amused when we read with what trifles Calvin's famous "discipline" was concerned. Still, the reader will be mistaken if he underestimates the refined skill of Master Jehan Calvin. Deliberately he made the net of prohibitions one with an exceedingly fine mesh, so fine that it was practically impossible for the fish to escape. Purposely these prohibitions related to trivial matters, so that everyone might suffer pangs of conscience, and become inspired with a permanent awe of almighty, all-knowing, authority. For the more caltrops that are strewed in front of us on our everyday road, the harder shall we find it to march forward freely and unconcernedly. Soon no



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one felt safe in Geneva, since the Consistory declared that human beings sinned almost every time they drew breath.

We need merely turn the pages of the minute-book of the Town Council to see how skilful were the methods of intimidation. One burgher smiled while attending a baptism: three days' imprisonment. Another, tired out on a hot summer day, went to sleep during the sermon: prison. Some working men ate pastry at breakfast: three days on bread and water. Two burghers played skittles: prison. Two others dined for a quarter bottle of wine: prison. A man refused to allow his son to be christened Abraham: prison. A blind fiddler played a dance: expelled from the city. Another praised Castelleo's translation of the Bible: expelled from Geneva. A girl was caught skating, a widow threw herself on the grave of her husband, a burgher offered his neighbour a pinch of snuff during divine service: they were summoned before the Consistory, exhorted, and ordered to do penance. And so on, and so on, without end. Some cheerful fellows, at Epiphany, stuck a bean into the cake: four-and-twenty hours on bread and water. A burgher said "Monsieur" Calvin instead of "Maître" Calvin. A couple of peasants, following ancient custom, talked about business matters on coming out of church: prison, prison, prison. A man played cards: he was pilloried with the pack of cards hung round his neck. Another sang riotously in the street: was told "he could go and sing elsewhere," this meaning that he was banished from the city. Two bargees had a brawl, in which no one was hurt: executed. Two boys, who behaved indelicately, were sentenced first of all to burning at the stake, then the sentence was commuted to compelling them to watch the blaze of the faggots.

Most savagely of all were punished any offenders whose behaviour challenged Calvin's political and

spiritual infallibility. A man who publicly protested against the reformer's doctrine of predestination, was mercilessly flogged at all the crossways of the city and then expelled. A book-printer, who, in his cups, had railed at Calvin, was sentenced to have his tongue perforated with a red hot iron before being expelled from the city. Jacques Gruet was racked and then executed merely for having called Calvin a hypocrite. Each offence, even the most paltry, was carefully entered in the records of the Consistory so that the private life of every citizen could unfailingly be held up against him in evidence.

It was inevitable that so unsleeping a terror should, in the end, banish a sense of dignity and a feeling of energy both from individuals and from the masses. When, in a State organization, every citizen has to accept that he will be questioned, examined, and condemned, since he knows that invisible spies are watching all his doings and noting all his words; when, without notice, either by day or by night, his house is liable to "visitations"—then people's nerves give way, and a sort of mass anxiety ensues, which extends by infection even to the most courageous. The strongest will is broken by the futility of the struggle. Thanks to his famous "discipline," Calvin's Geneva became what Calvin wanted: joyless, shy, and timid, with no capacity for resisting Master Calvin's will.

After a few years of this discipline, Geneva assumed a new aspect. What had once been a free and merry city, lay as it were beneath a pall. Bright garments disappeared, colours became drab, no bells rang from the church towers, no jolly songs re-echoed in the streets, every house became as bald and unadorned as a Calvinist place of worship. The inns were empty, now that

the fiddlers could no longer summon people to the dance, now that skittles could no longer be played, now that dice no longer rattled gaily on the tables. The dance-halls were empty; the dark alleys, where lovers had been wont to roam, were forsaken; only the naked interiors of the churches were the places, Sunday after Sunday, for gloomy-visaged and silent congregations. The town had assumed a morose visage like Calvin's own, and by degrees had grown as sour as he, and, either from fear or through unconscious imitation of his sternness, as sinister and reserved. People no longer roamed freely and light-heartedly hither and thither; their eyes could not flash gladly; and their glances betrayed nothing but fear, since merriment might be mistaken for sensuality. They no longer knew unconstraint, being afraid of the terrible man who himself was never cheerful. Even in the privacy of family life, they learned to whisper, for beyond the doors, listening at the keyholes, might be their serving men and maids. When fear has become second nature, the terror-stricken are perpetually on the look-out for spies. The great thing was, not to be conspicuous. Not to do anything that might arouse attention, either by one's dress or by a hasty word, or by a cheerful countenance. Avoid attracting suspicion; remain forgotten. The Genevese, in the latter years of Calvin's rule, sat at home as much as possible, for at home the walls of their houses and the bolts and bars on their doors might preserve them to some extent from prying eyes and from suspicion. But if, when they were looking out of the window, they saw some of the catchpoles of the Consistory coming along the street, they would draw back in alarm, for who could tell what neighbour might not have denounced them? When they had to go out, the citizens crept along furtively with downcast eyes and wrapped in their drab cloaks, as if they were going to a sermon or a funeral. Even the children, who had grown up amid this



new discipline, and were vigorously intimidated during the "lessons of edification," no longer played in the debonair way natural to healthy and happy youngsters, but shrank as a cur shrinks in expectation of a blow. They flagged as do flowers which have never known sufficient sunlight, but have been kept in semi-darkness.

The rhythm of the town was as regular as that of a clock, a chill tick-tack, never interrupted by festivals and fête-days—monotonous, orderly, and dependable. Any one visiting Geneva for the first time and walking through its streets, must have believed the city to be in mourning, so cold and gloomy were the inhabitants, so mute and cheerless the ways, so oppressive the spiritual atmosphere. Discipline was wonderfully maintained; but this intolerable moderation that Calvin had forced upon Geneva had been purchased by the loss of all the sacred energies, which can never thrive except where there is excess and unrestrained freedom. Though Geneva produced a great number of pious citizens, earnest theologians, and distinguished scholars, who made the city famous for all time, still, even two centuries after Calvin, there were in this town beside the Rhone no painters, no musicians, no artists with a worldwide reputation. The extraordinary was sacrificed to the ordinary, creative liberty to a thoroughly tamed servility. When, at long last, an artist was born in Geneva, his whole life was a revolt against the shackling of individuality. Only through the instrumentality of the most independent of its citizens, through Jean Jacques Rousseau, was Geneva able to liberate itself from the strait-waistcoat imposed upon it by Calvin.

## Chapter 3

### ENTER CASTELLIO

A DICTATOR who is feared is not necessarily loved; and those who submit to a reign of terror may be far from acknowledging its justification. No doubt, during the first months after Calvin's return to Geneva, the burghers and the civil authorities were unanimous in their admiration. All parties seemed well affected towards him. Since there was only one party, and only one supremacy, all were constrained to admit that the dictator moved resolutely towards his goal. Most of those to rule over whom he had been recalled, were carried away by the intoxication of unity. Soon a soberer mood set in. The men who had summoned Calvin to restore order, were inspired by the secret hope that this fierce dictator, when he had accomplished what was expected of him, would prove somewhat less draconian in his zeal for morality. Instead, from day to day the "discipline" grew stricter. Far from slackening the curb, and far from uttering a word of thanks to his fellow-citizens for the enormous sacrifices they were making by the surrender of individual liberty and of joyfulness, he continued to rail against them from the pulpit, declaring, to their profound disappointment, that the gallows was needed to stretch the necks of seventeen or eighteen hundred young men of Geneva before morality and discipline could be established in so corrupt a city. The Genevese at length realized that, instead of summoning one who would effect the mental healing they desired, they had brought back within the city walls one who would lay

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shackles on their freedom, and one whose more and more outrageously coercive measures would, in the end, alienate even the most loyal of his adherents.

Within a few months dissatisfaction with Calvin was again rife; for his boasted "discipline" had seemed far more seductive as a wish-dream than in reality. The glamour and romance had faded, and those who yesterday were rejoicing now began to murmur. Still, a palpable and easily understood reason is needed to shake the prestige of a dictator; nor was Calvin slow to provide one. The Genevese first began to doubt the infallibility of the Consistory during an epidemic of plague, which devastated the city from 1542 to 1545. The very preachers who had, in loud proclamation, insisted that, under pain of punishment, every sick person must within three days summon a divine to his bedside, now, when one of their number had been attacked by the infection, allowed the sick in the lazaretto to perish without spiritual consolation. Vainly did the municipal authorities try to discover at least one member of the Consistory who would be willing "to visit and to console the unfortunate patients in the pest-hospital." No one volunteered except Castellio, rector of the school, who was not commissioned because he was not a member of the Consistory. Even Calvin got his colleagues to declare him "indispensable," openly insisting "it would not do to weaken the whole Church in order to help a part of it." The other preachers, who had not so important a mission as Calvin's, were equally careful to keep out of danger. Vain were the appeals of the Council to these timid shepherds. A critic said frankly of the preachers: "They would rather be hanged than go to the lazaretto." On June 5, 1543, all the preachers of the Reformed religion in Geneva, headed by Calvin, appeared at a meeting of the Council to make the shameful admission that not one of them was bold enough to enter the pest-hospital, al-



though they knew it was appropriate to their office to serve God and the Church in evil days as well as in good.

Now, nothing is more enheartening to the populace than a display of personal courage by its leaders. In Marseilles, in Vienna, and in many other towns, after the lapse of centuries the memory of the heroic priests who did their duty during the great epidemic is held in high honour. The common folk never forget such heroism on the part of their leaders; and are even less inclined to forget pusillanimity in the decisive hour. Scornfully did the Genevese watch, and make mock of, those divines who, from the pulpit, had been accustomed to demand the greatest sacrifices of their congregation, but were now neither ready nor willing to make any sacrifice at all. A vain attempt to allay popular discontent followed, an infamous spectacle being staged. By order of the Council, some destitute fellows were seized, and were tortured until they admitted having brought plague into the town by smearing the door-latches with an ointment prepared from devil's dung. Calvin, instead of contemptuously dismissing such a tale, showed his fundamental conservatism by heartily supporting the medieval delusion. He did himself even more harm by publicly declaring that the "*semeurs de peste*" had done their work abominably well, and by maintaining in the pulpit that, in the broad light of day, an atheist had been dragged out of bed by the devil and flung into the Rhone. For the first time in his experience, he had to endure the humiliation of noticing that many members of his congregations did not even try to hide their smiles.

Anyhow, a large part of the faith in Calvin's infallibility, the faith which is an indispensable psychological element of every dictator's power, vanished during the epidemic of plague. The enthusiasm with which his return had been welcomed was passing off; and a spirit of resistance spread in widening circles. It was

Calvin's good fortune that they were widening circles, and that there was no concentration of hostility. Concentration has always been the temporal advantage of dictatorship, ensuring the persistence of a dictator's rule long after his active supporters have become no more than a minority. The militant will of these supporters manifests itself as an organized unity; whereas the contraposed wills, derived from various quarters and animated by various motives, rarely become assembled into an effective force. No matter that many are inspired with an inward revolt against dictatorship; if their hostility be not such as leads them to join in a unified movement for the carrying out of a common plan, their revolt is futile. Consequently, the period that elapses between the moment of the first challenge to a dictator's authority, and the moment of his eventual overthrow, is usually a long one. Calvin, his Consistory, his preachers, and the refugees who formed the bulk of his supporters, represented a single block, a circumscribed will, a concentrated and clearly directed energy. The adversaries were recruited haphazard from all possible spheres and classes. Some of them had been Catholics and still clung in secret to the old faith; some of them were toppers against whom the doors of the inns had been closed; some of them were women who were not allowed to make up their faces as of yore; on the other hand, among the malcontents were members of illustrious patrician families, enraged at the rise of the penniless to power, at the rise of those who, within a few months of setting foot in Geneva, had been able to secure the most comfortable and most lucrative posts. Thus the opposition, though numerically strong, was composed both of the noblest and of the basest elements; and so long as malcontents cannot join forces in pursuit of an ideal, they can only murmur impotently, remaining potential energy instead of becoming kinetic. They are a mob against an army,

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unorganized disaffection against organized terror, and therefore make no headway. During these first years, Calvin found it easy to hold the scattered groups in leash. They never combined effectively against him, and he dealt with each group in isolation.

The chief danger to an ideologist who has grasped the reins of power is a man who advocates a rival ideology. Calvin, a lucid thinker and ever on the alert, was quick to recognize this. The only opponents he seriously dreaded were those intellectually and morally his equals; and above all he feared Sebastian Castellio, who was certainly more than Calvin's equal intellectually and morally, and who rebelled with the ardour of a free spirit against the dictator's spiritual tyranny.

One portrait of Castellio has come down to us, and unfortunately it is a poor one. It shows a serious and thoughtful countenance, with candid eyes beneath a high, bold forehead. That is all the physiognomist can say. It does not grant us an insight into the depths of his character, and yet the man's most essential trait is unmistakably limned—his self-confidence and balance. If we place the portraits of Calvin and Castellio side by side, the opposition the two men were to manifest so decisively in the mental field is here plainly symbolized in the domain of the sensual. Calvin's visage is all tension, it expresses a convulsive and morbid energy, urgently and uncontrollably seeking discharge; Castellio's face is gentle and composed. The former displays fury and fret; the latter, serenity. We see impatience versus patience; impulsive zeal versus persistent resolution; fanaticism versus humanism.

We know almost as little about Castellio's youth as we do about his likeness. He was born in 1515, six years later than Calvin, in Dauphiné, the borderland country



between Switzerland, France, and Savoy. His family called itself Châteillon, Châtillon, or Châtaillon; under the Savoyard rule, perhaps Castellione or Castiglione. His mother tongue seems to have been French rather than Italian; though he spoke both fluently. Soon, his effective language was to be Latin, for, at the age of twenty, he entered the University of Lyons, acquiring there absolute mastery of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Subsequently he learned German as well. In all spheres of knowledge his zeal and his command were so outstanding that humanists and theologians unanimously voted him the most learned man of his day. Music attracted him, and it was by giving music lessons that he first earned a pittance. Then he wrote a number of Latin poems and prose works. Soon he was seized with a passion for the problems of his era, which seemed to him more fundamental than those of a remote classical past. If we consider humanism as a historical phenomenon, we find that the early phase of the movement, when the humanists gave most of their attention to the writings of the ancient Greeks and Romans, lasted for no more than a brief though glorious blossoming, during a few decades between the Renaissance and the coming of the Reformation. Only for this short space of time did the young look for deliverance to a revival, a renovation, thinking that systematized culture would redeem the world. Ere long, it became plain even to the devotees of classical lore, to the leaders of their generation, that valuable energy was being wasted in elaborating the texts of Cicero and Thucydides at a time when a religious revolution was affecting millions, and was devastating Germany like a forest fire. At the universities, there were more disputes about the old Church and the new than about Plato and Aristotle; professors and students studied the Bible instead of the Pandects. As in later times people have been engrossed by political, national or social move-

ments, so, in the sixteenth century, all the young folk in Europe had an irresistible craving to think and talk about the religious ideals of the day, and to help in this great movement. Castellio was seized by the same passion, and a personal experience set the keynote for a man of his humane temperament. When, for the first time, in Lyons, he watched the burning of heretics, he was shaken to the depths of his soul, on the one hand by the cruelty of the Inquisition, and on the other, by the courage of the victims. Henceforward he resolved to live and fight for the new doctrine, which for him would involve the apotheosis of liberty.

It need hardly be said that from the moment when Castellio, then four-and-twenty years of age, decided to espouse the cause of the Reformation, his life was in danger. Wherever a State or a system forcibly suppresses freedom of thought, only three possibilities are open to those who cannot endure the triumph of violence over conscience. They can openly resist the reign of terror and become martyrs; this was the bold course chosen by Louis de Berquin and Etienne Dolet, and it led them to the stake; or, wishing to preserve internal freedom, and at the same time to save their lives, then malcontents can ostensibly submit, and conceal or disguise their private opinions; such was the technique of Erasmus and Rabelais, who outwardly kept peace with Church and State, and, wearing motley and a fool's cap, skilfully avoided the weapons of their adversaries, while shooting poisoned arrows from an ambush, cheating the brutalitarians with the cunning of an Odysseus. The third expedient is to become a refugee who endeavours to carry his own share of internal freedom out of the country in which freedom is persecuted and despised, to a foreign soil where it can flourish unhindered. Castellio, being of an upright but yielding nature, chose the peaceful path. In the spring of 1540, shortly after he had

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watched the burning of some of the early Protestant martyrs, he left Lyons and became a missionary on behalf of Protestant teaching.

He made his way to Strasburg, and, like most of these religious refugees, "*propter Calvinum*"—for Calvin's sake. Inasmuch as Calvin, in the preface to his *Institutio*, had boldly challenged Francis I to show toleration and to permit freedom of belief, that author, though still quite a young man, came to be regarded by the inspired youth of France as herald and banner-bearer of evangelical doctrine. The refugees who had been persecuted like Calvin, hoped to learn from Calvin how to express their demands better, how to set their course more clearly, how to perform their life's task. As a disciple and an enthusiastic one (for Castellio's own enthusiasm for freedom made him regard Calvin as advocate of spiritual freedom), Castellio hastened to call on the latter in Strasburg, remaining for a week in the students' hostel which Calvin's wife had established in the city for these future missionaries of the new doctrine. Nevertheless the hoped-for intimacy could not immediately begin, for Calvin was soon summoned to the Councils of Worms and Hagenau. Thus the first contact profited neither. Yet it soon became plain that Castellio had produced a considerable impression upon Calvin; for hardly was the recall of the latter to Geneva decided on than, through Farel's recommendation, and unquestionably with Calvin's full assent, the youthful French or Savoyard scholar received a call to become teacher in the College of Geneva. Castellio was given the post of rector, two assistant teachers were placed under his direction, and he was also commissioned to preach in the church at Vandoeuvres, a suburb of Geneva.

Castellio justified this confidence, and his teaching activities secured for him a remarkable success. In order to facilitate the study of Latin, and to make it more



attractive, Castellio translated and recast the most vivid episodes of the Old Testament and the New into Latin and French dialogues. Soon the little volume, which had been primarily designed as a *pons asinorum* for the youngsters of Geneva, became widely known throughout the world, and had a literary and pedagogic influence which was perhaps only equalled by that of Erasmus's *Colloquies*. For centuries the booklet was printed and reprinted, there having been no less than forty-seven editions; and through its pages hundreds of pupils learnt the elements of classical Latin. Although, among Castellio's humanist endeavours, the manual is no more than a parergon, a chance product, still, it was thanks to this book that he became a prominent figure.

Castellio's ambition was directed towards higher aims than the writing of a convenient and useful manual for school children. He had not renounced humanism in its familiar form in order to squander his energy and learning upon such petty tasks. The young idealist had the sublime intention to repeat and outclass the mighty deeds of Erasmus and Luther. He determined upon no less an undertaking than the translation of the entire Bible into Latin, and subsequently into French. His own people, the French, were to have the whole truth; as the humanist and German world had received the whole truth through Erasmus's and Luther's creative will. Castellio set himself to this gigantic task with characteristic tenacity and quiet confidence. Night after night he burned the midnight oil, although in the daylight hours he had to work hard for meagre pay in order to earn a subsistence for his family. Thus did he devote himself to carrying out a plan to which he intended to give up his life.

At the outset, however, Castellio encountered deter-

mined resistance. A Genevese bookseller had promised to print the first part of his Latin translation of the Bible, but Calvin was unrestricted dictator in Geneva as far as psychological and spiritual things were concerned. No book could be printed within the walls of the city without his *imprimatur*. Censorship is the inevitable sister of dictatorship.

Castellio called on Calvin, a theologian knocked at the door of another theologian, to ask for his colleague's endorsement. But persons of authoritarian nature always see their own will-to-power unpleasantly caricatured by any sort of independent thought. Calvin's immediate reaction was displeasure and scarcely concealed annoyance. He had written a preface for a relative's French translation of the Bible, recognizing this as, in a sort, the Vulgate, the officially valid vernacular Bible of Protestantism. How "presumptuous" of this young man, not to recognize that the version which Calvin had approved and collaborated in, was the only authorized French translation. Yet Castellio actually proposed to shove it aside and make a new version of his own. Calvin's irritability concerning his junior's impudence is shown by the following letter to Viret: "Just listen to Sebastian's preposterous scheme, which makes me smile, and at the same time angers me. Three days ago he called on me, to ask permission for the publication of his translation of the New Testament." The ironical tone shows that Calvin had taken Castellio's rivalry much to heart. As a matter of fact, Calvin refused Castellio an unconditional *imprimatur*. He would grant permission only with the proviso that he himself was first to read the translation and make whatever corrections he thought expedient.

Nothing could be further from Castellio's nature than conceit or undue self-confidence. He never did what Calvin so often did—never proclaimed his opinion to be the only sound one, his outlook upon any matter to be

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flawless and incontestable. The preface he later wrote to this translation is a signal example of scientific and human modesty. He admitted frankly that he did not understand all the passages in Holy Writ, and therefore warned the reader against putting undue confidence in his (Castellio's) translation. The Bible was an obscure book, full of contradictions, and what the author of this new translation could offer was no more than an interpretation, not a certainty.

But though Castellio was able to contemplate his own work in a humble spirit, he regarded personal independence as a jewel beyond price. Aware that as a Hebraist, as a Greek scholar, as a man of learning, he was nowise inferior to Calvin, he rightly regarded this lofty kind of censorship, this authoritarian claim to "improve," as derogatory. In a free republic, scholar beside scholar, theologian beside theologian, he had no intention of sitting as pupil at Calvin's feet, or of allowing his work to be blue-pencilled as a schoolmaster blue-pencils exercises. Wishing to find a way out of the difficulty without offending Calvin whom he greatly respected, he offered to read the manuscript aloud at any time that best suited Calvin, and declared himself ready to do his utmost to profit by Calvin's advice and proposals. But Calvin, as I have already said, was opposed to conciliation or compromise. He would not advise, but only command. He bluntly rejected Castellio's proposal. "I told him that even if he promised me a hundred crowns I should never be prepared to pledge myself to discussions at a particular moment, and then, perhaps, to wrangle for two hours over a single word. Thereupon he departed much mortified."

For the first time the blades had crossed. Calvin realized that Castellio was far from inclined to submit unprotestingly in spiritual and religious matters. Underneath the studied courtesy, he sensed the eternal adver-



sary of every dictatorship, the man of independent mind. From this hour Calvin determined to seize the first opportunity for dislodging one who would serve his own conscience rather than obey another's orders. If possible, Castellio must be driven out of Geneva.

He who seeks a pretext for his actions will always be able to find it. Calvin had not long to wait. Castellio, who had a large family, and was unable to meet expenses out of the starveling salary paid him at the College, aspired to the more congenial and better paid post of "preacher of God's word." Since the day when he fled from Lyons this had been his chief aim—to become a servant and expounder of evangelical doctrine. For months the distinguished theologian had been preaching in the church of Vandoeuvres, without rousing adverse criticism. Not another soul in Geneva could put forward so reasonable a claim to be appointed a member of the Protestant priesthood. In fact, Castellio's application was supported by the town authorities, who, on December 15, 1543, passed a resolution unanimously to the effect: "Since Sebastian is a learned man and well fitted to be a servant of the church, we hereby command this appointment."

But the town authorities had not taken Calvin into account. What? Without submitting the matter to their chief preacher they had ventured to appoint Castellio, one who, as a person of independent mind, might give Calvin trouble? Especially so since the appointment of preacher carried with it membership of the Consistory. Calvin instantly entered a protest, justifying his action in a letter to Farel by the obscure phrase: "There are important reasons against this appointment. To the Council I merely hinted at these reasons, without expressing them openly. At the same time, to avert erroneous sus-

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picion, I was careful to make no attack on his reputation, being desirous to protect him."

When we read these obscure and mysterious words, a disagreeable suspicion creeps into the mind. How can we avoid thinking that there must be something against Castellio, something wrong with the man which unfits him for the dignity of preacher, some blot known to Calvin, but which Calvin wishes to conceal with the mantle of Christian charity in order to "protect" Castellio? What offence, we ask ourselves, can this highly respected scholar have committed—an offence which Calvin magnanimously conceals? Has he taken bribes from across the frontier; or has he cohabited with loose women? What secret aberrations underlie a repute which has hitherto been blameless? Plainly Calvin must have wished to surround Castellio with an atmosphere of vague suspicion; and nothing can be more disastrous to a man's reputation than such a "protective" ambiguity.

Sebastian Castellio, however, had no desire to be "protected." His conscience was clear; and as soon as he learned that there was an endeavour to get the appointment cancelled, he came out into the open, insisting that Calvin must publicly declare before the Town Council why his (Castellio's) appointment as preacher should be refused. Now Calvin was forced to show his colours, and to declare what had been Castellio's mysterious offence. Here it is, this crime Calvin had so delicately concealed. The error was the terrible one, as concerned two minor interpretations of the Scriptures, of having differed a little from Calvin. First of all Castellio had declared that the Song of Solomon was not a sacred but a profane poem. The pæan on the Shulamite, whose breasts "were like two fawns that were twins of a roe," is part of a secular love poem and is far from containing a glorificatory allusion to the Church. The second deviation was a matter equally trifling. Castellio had explained

the descent of Jesus into hell in another sense than Calvin.

So unimportant seems the "magnanimously concealed" crime of Castellio, the offence because of which Castellio must be refused appointment as preacher. But, and this is the really important matter, for such a man as Calvin there are, in the doctrinal domain, no such things as trifles. To his orderly spirit, claiming, under the seal of his own authority, to establish supreme unity in the Church, an ostensibly trifling deviation is no less dangerous than gross error. In the logical edifice which he was building upon such consistent lines, every stone, and every smaller fragment, must be snugly fitted into its place; and as in political life, as in respect of customs and laws, so also in the religious sphere, he objected on principle to any kind of freedom. If his Church was to endure, it must remain authoritarian from its foundations to its topmost pinnacles; and there was no room in his State for one who refused to recognize his supreme leadership, or entertained liberal aspirations.

It was, therefore, a waste of pains for the Council to cite Castellio and Calvin to a public disputation, when they would furnish documentary warrants for their respective opinions. I cannot repeat too often that Calvin wished only to teach, being never willing to rally in support of another's teaching. He refused to discuss matters with any one, but merely dictated. In his first utterance upon this affair, he demanded that Castellio should "come over to our way of thinking," and warned him against "trusting in his own judgment," which would conflict with the essential unity of the Church. Castellio, no less than Calvin, remained true to himself. For Castellio, freedom of conscience was man's supreme spiritual good, and on behalf of this freedom he was ready to pay any secular price. He knew that he need merely get the better of Calvin as regards these two unimportant



details and that thereupon a lucrative position in the Consistory would be open to him.

With unyielding independence, Castellio replied that nothing would induce him to make a promise he could not keep, since that promise would involve his acting in defiance of his conscience. A public disputation between Castellio and Calvin would therefore be futile. In their respective personalities, at this particular moment, the liberal Reformation, that of those who demanded for every one freedom in matters of religion, found itself faced by the orthodox Reformation. After this futile controversy with Castellio, Calvin was justified in writing: "As far as I have been able to judge from our conversations, he is a man who holds such opinions concerning me as to make it hard to believe that we can ever come to an understanding."

What sort of opinions had Castellio about Calvin? Calvin discloses this by writing: "Sebastian has got it into his head that I crave to dominate." How, indeed, could the actual position of affairs be more tersely and expressively stated? For two years Castellio had known what others would soon know, that Calvin, in accordance with his tyrannical impulses, would only tolerate in Geneva the opinions of one person, his own; and that no one could live within his sphere of spiritual influence, unless, like de Bèze and similar followers, he was prepared to be guided by Calvin in respect of every jot and tittle of doctrine. Now Castellio could not breathe this prison air, could not endure such spiritual coercion. He had not fled from France and escaped the Catholic Inquisition, in order to subordinate himself to a new, a Protestant control and supervision; he had not repudiated ancient dogma, in order to become the slave of a new dogma. Whereas Calvin regarded the gospels as a

rigid and systematized legal code, for Castellio, Jesus was the most human of human beings, was an ethical prototype, to be imitated by every Christian disciple in his own way and to be humbly interpreted by the light of reason, without this implying the contention that one who put forward a new interpretation was the sole possessor of the truth. Castellio could not but be outraged to notice with what overweening confidence the preachers in Geneva were expounding the word of God, as if it had been so uttered as to be intelligible to themselves alone. He was exasperated by such opinionatedness, by the cocksureness of those who were continually insisting upon the sanctity of their calling, while speaking of all others as miserable sinners. When, at a public meeting, a comment was made upon the apostolic utterance: "But in all things approve ourselves as the ministers of God, in great patience"—Castellio rose to his feet and asked "God's messengers" to abide by the results of such an examination, instead of testing, punishing, and slaying those from whom they differed. Unfortunately we can only guess at the actual words used by Castellio from a study of the remarks as edited by Calvin—who had no scruples about altering even the sacred text when alteration was needed to get the better of an adversary. Still, even from Calvin's biased description we can infer that Castellio, in his avowal of universal fallibility, included himself among the fallible; "Paul was one of God's servants, whereas we serve ourselves. Paul was patient, but we are extremely impatient. Paul suffered injustice at the hands of others, but we persecute the innocent."

Calvin, who was present at the aforesaid meeting, would seem to have been taken altogether by surprise by Castellio's onslaught. A passionate and sanguine disputant, such a man as Luther, would have hastened to reply stormily; and Erasmus, a humanist, would most

likely have argued learnedly and without too much heat. But Calvin was first, last, and all the time a realist; a man of tactics and practice; a man who knew how to curb his temperament. He was able to note how strong an impression Castellio's words were having on those present, and realized that the moment was inopportune for retaliation. So he made no rejoinder, narrowing his thin lips even more. "For the moment I held my peace," he says when he wishes to excuse himself for his strange reserve; "but only to avoid initiating a violent discussion before numerous foreigners."

What will he say later in more intimate circles? Will he expound his differences with Castellio, man against man, opinion against opinion? Will he summon Castellio before the Consistory, challenge his opponent, document general accusations with names and with facts? Not a bit of it. Calvin was never inclined to take a straightforward course in political matters. For him, every attempt at adverse criticism represented something more than a theoretical divergence of opinion; it was also an offence against the State, it constituted a crime. Now crimes must be dealt with by the secular arm. Castellio was summoned to appear, not before the Consistory but before the temporal authority; a moral dispute was transformed into a disciplinary procedure. His indictment, as laid before the Town Council in Geneva, ran: "Castellio has undermined the prestige of the clergy."

The Council was loth to consider this question. It had no love for quarrels among preachers. We cannot help thinking that the secular authority was uneasy about the Consistory's usurpation of power. The councillors postponed a decision for a considerable time, and their ultimate judgment proved ambiguous. Castellio was censured without being either punished or dismissed; but his activities as preacher in Vandoeuvres were suspended until further notice.



It might be thought that so lukewarm a reprimand would suffice Castellio. But he had made up his mind otherwise. This affair merely served to confirm his previous opinion that there was no room for a free spirit in Geneva under the dictatorship of a tyrant like Calvin. He therefore begged the Council to relieve him of his office. From this first trial of strength, and from his adversary's tactics, he had learned enough to know that political partisans deal arbitrarily with truth when they want what they call truth to serve their policy. Castellio plainly foresaw that his frank and manly rejection of office and dignity would only make his enemy spread hints that Castellio had lost his position for some sort of misconduct. Before leaving Geneva, therefore, Castellio demanded a written report about the affair. Calvin had no choice but to sign this report, which is still extant among State documents in the library at Basle. There we read that Castellio was refused appointment as preacher merely because of two theological deviations concerning matters of trifling importance. Here is the actual wording of the latter part of the report: "That no one may form a false idea of the reasons for the departure of Sebastian Castellio, we all declare that he has voluntarily resigned his position as rector at the College, and up till now performed his duties in such a way that we regarded him worthy to become one of our preachers. If, in the end, the affair was not thus arranged, this is not because any fault has been found in Castellio's conduct, but merely for the reasons previously indicated."

Calvin had certainly gained a victory by securing the expulsion from Geneva of the only man who could stand up against him; but this victory was indubitably Pyrrhic. Castellio was highly esteemed, and many regarded his departure as a serious loss to the city. It was publicly

declared that "Calvin had done grave wrong to Master Castellio"; and throughout the cosmopolitan world of the humanists, it was generally held that Calvin would tolerate in Geneva none but those who said Aye to all his opinions. Two hundred years later, Voltaire mentioned the suppression of Castellio as a decisive proof of Calvin's attitude of mind. "We can measure the virulence of this tyranny by the persecution to which Castellio was exposed at Calvin's instance—although Castellio was a far greater scholar than Calvin whose jealousy drove him out of Geneva."

Calvin's skin was unduly sensitive to criticism. He was quick to realize that public opinion was against him, that the general inclination was to make him responsible for Castellio's downfall. Hardly had he attained his end, and had directly been successful in expelling the only independent from Geneva, than he was troubled by the thought that Castellio's consequent poverty and hardships would be laid upon his (Calvin's) shoulders. In truth, Castellio's decision was made in desperation. As a declared opponent of the man who, politically speaking, was the mightiest Protestant in Switzerland, Castellio could not count on the likelihood of soon receiving another appointment in the Reformed Church; and his impetuous determination to leave, reduced him to penury. Hunger-stricken, the man who had been rector of the Genevese Reformed College was constrained to beg subsistence from door to door; and Calvin was keen witted enough to recognize that the manifest destitution of a vanquished rival would react upon his own head. Calvin, therefore, now that Castellio no longer annoyed him by proximity, tried to build a golden bridge for the hunted man's flight. At this juncture he must have spent a large proportion of his time in writing letter after letter of self-exculpation, declaring what a lot of trouble he had taken in order to obtain for Castellio a suitable position

—for Castellio the poor and needy. (Why was Castellio poor and needy except through Calvin's fault?) "I wish that I could find satisfactory accommodation somewhere, and I would do anything I could to promote this." But Castellio would not, as Calvin hoped, allow his mouth to be closed. He told all and sundry that he had been compelled to quit Geneva because of Calvin's autocratic ways; thereby touching a very sore spot, for never would Calvin openly admit himself to be a dictator, but invariably described himself as one who modestly and humbly performed the difficult task that had been assigned to him.

Immediately there came a change in the tone of his letters to his friends, and he no longer sympathized with Castellio. "If you only knew," he writes to one of his correspondents, "how this cur (I mean Sebastian Castellio) has yelped against me. He declares that he was expelled from office by my tyranny, and that I wished to be a supreme ruler." In the course of a few months, the very man whom Calvin had described as worthy to occupy the sacred office of servant of the Lord, has become a "*bestia*," a "cur"—merely because Castellio accepted extreme poverty rather than allow himself to be bought and silenced by the bestowal of prebends.

This heroic acceptance of poverty, voluntarily incurred, aroused admiration among Castellio's contemporaries. Montaigne said it was deplorable that a man who had done such good service as Castellio should have fallen upon evil days; and, added the French essayist, many persons would unquestionably have been glad to help Castellio had they known soon enough that he was in want. Montaigne was too sanguine. No one stirred a finger to spare Castellio the last extremities of want. Year followed year before the man who had been



hounded out of his post could acquire one in the least accordant with his learning and moral superiority. For a long time no university gave him a call, no position as preacher was offered him, for the political dependence of the Swiss towns upon Calvin was already so great that no one ventured to do a good turn to the adversaries of the Genevese dictator. However, the hunted man was able to earn a pittance in a subordinate position as corrector of the press at the Basle printing house of Oporin; but the job was irregular, did not suffice to feed his wife and children as well as himself, so Castellio had to do overtime work as private tutor in order to nourish his dependants, six or eight in number. Years of want, during which his energies were paralysed, had to be endured before the university was at length to give this man of encyclopædic knowledge the position of lector in Greek. But this lectorship, more honourable than lucrative, was far from releasing Castellio from the pressure of unceasing toil. For years and years, while his life lasted, the great scholar (regarded by many as the greatest scholar of the day) had to do hodman's work. With his own hands he shovelled earth in a suburb of Basle; and since his daily labours did not suffice to feed his family, Castellio sat up all night correcting proofs, touching up the writings of others, translating from numberless languages. We can count by thousands the pages he translated from Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Italian, and German, for the Basle book printer—simply in order to secure daily bread.

By these years of deprivation, the strength of his weakly and over-sensitive body was undermined, but never would his independent and resolute spirit be impaired. For, amid these arduous labours, Castellio never forgot his true task. Indefatigably he continued his life's work, the translation of the Bible into Latin and French. In interludes he composed polemics, penned comment-

aries and dialogues. Not a day, not a night, passed in which Castellio did not remain hard at work. Never was he to know the delights of travel, the joys of relaxation, nor even the sensual rewards of fame and wealth. But he would rather accept the gall of unceasing poverty, would rather forfeit his chances of sleep, than be untrue to his conscience. Thus he provides us with a magnificent example of the spiritual hero, who, unseen by the world and in the darkness of oblivion, struggles on behalf of what he regards as a holy of holies—the inviolability of his words, and his indestructible right to his own opinion.

The real duel between Castellio and Calvin had not yet begun. But two men, two ideas, had contemplated one another, and each had recognized the other to be an irreconcilable opponent. They could not have lived for an hour in the same town, in the same spiritual area; but, although they were physically separated, one being in Basle and the other in Geneva, they kept a close watch on one another. Castellio did not forget Calvin, nor Calvin Castellio; and though they were silent about one another, it was only while waiting until the decisive word should be spoken. Such oppositions, which are something more than mere differences of opinion, being a primal feud between one philosophy and another, can never come to terms; never can spiritual freedom be at ease under the shadow of dictatorship; and never can a dictatorship be carefree and self-confident so long as one independent is afoot within its sphere of influence. But some special cause is requisite to rouse latent tensions to activity. Not until Calvin had the faggots fired to burn Servetus, did the words which had long been trembling on Castellio's lips find vent. Only when Calvin declared war against every one whose spirit was free, would Castellio declare, in the name of freedom of conscience, a life-and-death struggle against Calvin.

## Chapter 4

### THE SERVETUS AFFAIR

FROM time to time, history seems to choose out of the millions one outstanding figure, as if to symbolize some peculiar philosophic outlook. Such a man need not be a genius of the first rank. Often destiny is satisfied to make a haphazard name conspicuous among many, which is thenceforward ineradicably impressed in the memories of our race. Thus Miguel Servetus was not a man of supreme intelligence, but his personality has been made ever memorable by his terrible fate. He had many gifts, multifarious talents, but they were ill-assorted and badly arranged. He had a powerful, alert, inquisitive, and stubborn mind, but he inclined to flit from one problem to another; his keen desire to unveil the truth was blunted by a lack of creative clarity. His Faustian intelligence never acquired a thorough knowledge of any science, although he studied them all. He was a free-lance in philosophy, medicine, and theology, often dazzling the reader by his bold observations, but soon lapsing into quackery. Once, amid his prophetic revelations, he made a pioneer observation, announcing the medical discovery of the lesser or pulmonary circulation; but he never took the trouble to exploit his discovery, or to trace its relationships in the world of scientific achievement; so his flash of insight was a transitory gleam of illumination upon the dark visage of his century. He had much intellectual energy, though he was incapable of following his own lights, and nothing but the sustained endeavour to reach a goal can transform an able spirit into a creative genius.



It has become a commonplace to say that every Spaniard has some of the traits of a Don Quixote; but certainly the remark applies admirably to Miguel Servetus, the Aragonese. His physique was frail, his face pallid, with a beard trimmed to a point, so that outwardly he resembled the long, lean hero of La Mancha; while inwardly he was consumed by Don Quixote's splendid though grotesque craving to fight on behalf of the absurd, and to tilt blindly against the windmills of reality. Utterly devoid of the power of self-criticism, always making or believing himself to have made new discoveries, this knight errant of theology, lance in hand, rode furiously against all possible obstacles. Nothing but adventure could stimulate him; nothing but the absurd, the preposterous, the dangerous; and he laid about him contentiously, exchanging shrewd blows with those who differed from him as to what was right or wrong, never joining a party or belonging to a clan, the eternal solitary, imaginative in the good sense and fanciful in the bad—and always unique and eccentric.

Being thus puffed up with conceit, a man everlastingly ready to do battle, it was inevitable that he should raise up adversaries wherever he went. Still, his student days, first at Saragossa, and then at Toulouse, were comparatively peaceful. Charles V's confessor, making his acquaintance at the University of Toulouse, carried him off as private secretary to Italy and subsequently took him to the Augsburg Diet. There the young humanist, like most of his contemporaries, succumbed to the prevailing passion as far as the great religious dispute was concerned. The ferment of the conflict between the old doctrine and the new set to work in him. Where all were combative, this contentious fellow must be combative like the rest; where so many were eager to reform the Church, he must have a hand in the game; and he considered, in his haste and heat, that every previous

departure from the teachings and solutions of the ancient Church, had been timid, lukewarm, indecisive. Even such able innovators as Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, were not revolutionary enough for him in their cleansing of the gospels, for they had not broken away from the dogma of the Trinity. Servetus, with the uncompromising spirit of youth, declared, at twenty years of age, that the Council of Nicæa had decided wrongly, and that the dogma of the three eternal hypostases was incompatible with the unity of the divine nature.

So radical a view was not anything remarkable in that period when the currents of religious excitement ran high. Whenever values are being revalued and laws are being restated, people claim for themselves the right of breaking away from tradition and of thinking independent thoughts. What was disastrous to Servetus was that he took over from the quarrelsome theologians, not only their fondness for debate, but also their worst quality, their fanatical and dogmatical disputatiousness. He was eager to show the leaders of the Reformation that their remoulding of the ecclesiastical doctrines had been wholly inadequate, and that he, Miguel Servetus, was alone acquainted with the truth. He hastened to visit the greatest scholars of the day—in Strasburg, Martin Bucer and Capito; in Basle, Oecolampadius—to urge them to make short work, as far as the Evangelical Church was concerned, with the “erroneous” dogma of the Trinity. The reader can imagine the fury and disgust of these dignified and mature preachers and professors, when a Spanish greenhorn forced his way into their houses, and, with the uncontrol of a vigorous but hysterical temperament, insisted that they instantly modify their views and unhesitatingly adopt his revolutionary thesis. They felt as if the devil himself had sent one of his minions, and they crossed themselves to exorcise this fanatical heretic. Oecolampadius drove him

away as he would have driven away a rabid dog, declaring him to be a "Jew, Turk, blasphemer, and a man possessed." Bucer, from his pulpit, denounced Servetus as a child of the devil. Zwingli expressly warned his adherents against this "criminal Spaniard, whose false and evil doctrine, would, if it could, sweep away our whole Christian religion."

But, just as little as the knight of La Mancha was to be cured of his delusions by abuse or violence, just so little would this quixotic theologian listen to argument or accept reproof. If the leaders could not understand him, if the wise and the prudent would not listen to him in their studies, then he must carry on his campaign among the public at large. The whole Christian world should read his theses. He would publish a book. At two-and-twenty, Servetus gathered together the last of his funds, and had his views printed at Hagenau (*De Trinitatis erroribus libri septem*, 1531). Thereupon the storm broke. Bucer did not hesitate to say that the rascal deserved "to have the guts torn out of his living body"; and throughout the Protestant world Servetus from this hour was considered to be nothing more nor less than an emissary of Satan.

It need hardly be said that one who had assumed so provocative an attitude, who had declared both Catholic and Protestant doctrines to be false, could no longer find a resting-place among Christians, or discover a roof beneath which he could lay his head. From the time when Miguel Servetus had, in cold type, been guilty of espousing the "Arian heresy," he was hunted like a wild beast. Nothing could save him but disappearance from the scene, and the adoption of an alias, since his name was in such evil odour. He therefore returned to France as Michel de Villeneuve, and, under this fancy appellation, secured work as proof corrector to the Brothers Trechsel in Lyons. In this new sphere of life, his



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amateurish but strongly imaginative insight soon found fresh stimulus and other polemic possibilities. When correcting the proofs of an edition of Ptolemy's *Geography*, Servetus, betwixt night and morning, transformed himself into a professional geographer, and provided the work with a detailed introduction. Again, when he was revising the proofs of medical books, his mobile mind became that of a doctor, and ere long, he did actually devote himself to the study of medicine. Removing to Paris with this end in view, he worked beside Vesalius upon the preparation of dissections and gave anatomical lectures. But here likewise, as before in the field of theology, the impatient man, ere he had completed his studies and had been granted a medical degree, began to teach others and tried to excel his competitors. Then, in the medical school at Paris, he announced that he was going to give lectures on mathematics, meteorology, astronomy, and astrology; but the physicians at the university were exasperated at this mishmash of astrology with the healing art, and they took some of his quackeries amiss. Servetus-Villanovus fell into disfavour with the authorities; and the Parlement of Paris received a complaint that he was doing much mischief with his "judicial astrology," a science condemned both by divine and mundane laws. Once more Servetus saved himself by flight, although not before the identity of "Michel de Villeneuve" with the wanted heretic Miguel Servetus, had been disclosed. Still, Villanovus the instructor quitted Paris as inconspicuously as Servetus the theologian had previously quitted Germany. For a long time nothing was heard of him; and when he cropped up again he was wearing a new mask. Who would suspect that Pierre Paulmier, Archbishop of Vienne, could have engaged as his physician in ordinary one who had been outlawed as a heretic and condemned by the Parlement of Paris as a charlatan? Anyhow Michel de Villeneuve

was careful, in Vienne, to abstain from enunciating heretical theses. He sang small and remained inconspicuous; he visited and cured many of the sick; he earned considerable sums of money; and the wealthy burghers of Vienne raised their hats whenever, with Spanish grandezza, Monsieur le docteur Michel de Villeneuve, physician in ordinary to his archiepiscopal eminence, encountered them in his walks abroad. "What a distinguished, pious, learned, and modest man!"

Truth to tell, the arch-heretic was by no means dead in this passionate and impatient Spaniard. Miguel Servetus was still animated by the old spirit of inquiry and unrest. When an idea has taken possession of a man, he is as if stricken by a fever. His ideals acquire independent vitality, seeking expansion and liberty. Inevitably to every thinker comes the hour when some leading notion seeks exit as irresistibly as a splinter seeks issue from a suppurating finger, as a child seeks to come forth from the mother's womb, as a swelling fruit seeks to burst its shell. A man as passionate and self-assertive as Servetus will not, in the long run, endure the constraint of thinking his leading thoughts solely for himself; he craves irresistibly to compel the world to think with him. For Servetus it was a daily torment to see how the Protestant leaders continued to promulgate what he regarded as the erroneous dogmas of infant baptism and the Trinity; how Christendom was still contaminated by "anti-Christian" errors. Was it not his duty to come into the open and proclaim his mission on behalf of the true faith? We cannot doubt that Servetus must have suffered spiritual agonies during these years of enforced silence. The unspoken message rioted within him, and, as an outlaw and one for whose safety it was essential that he should remain invisible, he was compelled to

keep his mouth shut. Servetus at length decided to find a sympathetic correspondent with whom to carry on intellectual converse. Since, in his present home, he could not venture to discuss his theological convictions with any one by word of mouth, he would discuss them secretly in writing.

The disastrous thing for Servetus was that, in his blindness, he pitched upon Calvin as a theologian worthy of his confidence; hoping that this bold and revolutionary innovator would be ready to sympathize with even bolder interpretations of Holy Writ. It may be that in approaching Calvin, Servetus was merely renewing an old acquaintanceship, and resuming a conversation begun long before. As undergraduates they had certainly met in Paris; but it was not until Calvin had become master of Geneva, and until Michel de Villeneuve was physician in ordinary to the Archbishop of Vienne, that, through the intermediation of Jehan Frellon, scholar and publisher in Lyons, correspondence was opened between the pair. The initiative came from Servetus. With urgency, nay with importunacy, he applied to Calvin, hoping to win for his anti-Trinitarian theses the support of the most outstanding theoretician of the Reformation. With this end in view, Servetus wrote letter after letter. Calvin's answers were at first only in the tone of one who corrects errors in dogma. Believing it to be his duty to lead back into the true path those who had strayed, to guide wandering sheep into the true fold, Calvin did his best to convince Servetus of error. But at length, he grew irritated at the overbearing and presumptuous tone used by Servetus. Assuredly to write to Calvin, authoritarian, opinionated, and prone to become splenetic at the slightest contradiction: "I have often explained to you that you are on the wrong path in disregarding the vast differences between the three divine essences," was to touch a dangerous adversary on the raw. But when



Servetus at length dared to send the distinguished author of the *Institutio religionis Christianae* a copy of that book in which, like a master dealing with a schoolboy's composition, the Spaniard had marked the supposed errors in the margin, it is easy to understand how wrathful must have been the Genevese dictator at such arrogance on the part of an amateur theologian. "Servetus seizes my books and defiles them with abusive remarks much as a dog bites a stone and gnaws it," wrote Calvin contemptuously to his friend Farel. Why should he waste his time disputing with such an incurable idiot? He rids himself of Servetus's arguments with a kick. "I care as little for this fellow's words as I care for the heehaw of a donkey (*le hin-han d'un âne*)."

The unlucky Don Quixote, instead of perceiving before it was too late against what an armour-plate of self-satisfaction he was tilting with his slender lance, returned to the charge. Calvin, who will have nothing to do with him, is the very man whom, above all others, he wants to convince. It almost seemed as if Servetus, to quote Calvin's words, had been "possessed by the devil." Instead of fighting shy of Calvin as the most formidable of possible opponents, Servetus sent to Calvin the proofs of a work of his own which had not yet issued from the press, a theological book, whose very title was enough to enrage Calvin. For Servetus had named his work *Christianismi restitutio*, in order to demonstrate to the world that Calvin's *Institutio* must be counterblasted by a *Restitutio*. For Calvin, the morbid controversialist's craving to convert him, and the Spaniard's importunacy, were now too much. He wrote to inform Frellon, the bookseller who had acted as intermediary in this correspondence, saying that he (Calvin) had a better use for his time than to read the letters of such an inflated idiot. Simultaneously, he penned words which were subsequently to be of terrible moment. Here is what he wrote

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to Farel: "Servetus wrote to me lately, and beside his letter sent me a great volume full of his ravings, maintaining with incredible presumption in the letter that I shall there find things stupendous and unheard of till now. He declares himself ready to come hither if I wish him to; but I shall not pledge my faith to him; for if he did come here, I would see to it, in so far as I have authority in this city, that he should not leave it alive."

We do not know whether Servetus was informed of this threat; or whether (in a lost letter) Calvin may have given him an obscure warning. Certainly the Spaniard seems at length to have realized that he had roused in Calvin a spirit of murderous hatred. For the first time he became uneasy about the manuscript which he had sent Calvin "*sub sigillo secreti*"; for it might prove disastrous that this document was in the hands of one who so openly expressed hostility. "Since you opine," wrote Servetus to Calvin in alarm, "that I am a Satan, I propose to go no further. Send me back my manuscript and may all be well with you. But if you honestly believe the Pope to be Antichrist, you must also be convinced that the Trinity and infant baptism, which are parts of papistical doctrine, are devilish dogmas."

Calvin made no reply. He had no intention of sending Servetus's manuscript back to the author, but put the heretical writing carefully away in a drawer, where he could lay his hand on it whenever he should need it. For both the contending parties knew, after the acrimony of their last utterances, that a fiercer struggle was inevitable; and, his mind full of gloomy anticipations, Servetus wrote at this time to a theologian: "It is now perfectly plain to me that I am doomed to suffer death in this cause, but the thought cannot shake my courage. As one of Jesus' disciples, I shall advance in the footsteps of my master."

Castellio and Servetus and a hundred others had occasion to learn that it is extremely dangerous to contradict so fanatical a dogmatist as Calvin, or to challenge such a man even upon minor points of doctrine. In these respects, Calvin was true to type, being rigid and methodical. He did not succumb to outbursts of passion, as did Luther, the berserk, or to the churlishness which was characteristic of Farel. His hatred was as harsh, as sharp, as incisive, as a rapier: not deriving, like Luther's from the blood, from temperament, from passion, or from spleen. Calvin's tenacious and cold rancour sprang from brain, and his hatred had a terribly good memory. Calvin never forgot. De la Mare, the pastor, wrote of him: "*quand il a la dent contre quelqu'un ce n'est jamais fait.*" A name once inscribed upon the tablets of his memory would remain indelible until the man himself had been erased from the Book of Life. Thus it mattered not that several years would elapse during which Calvin heard no more of Servetus. Calvin continued to bear Servetus in mind. The compromising documents lay silent in the drawer where they had been put for safe keeping; arrows were ready in his quiver; hatred smouldered in his inexorable soul.

For years Servetus made no move. He gave up the attempt to convince a man who was unteachable, devoting himself passionately to his work. With the most touching devotion, the archbishop's physician in ordinary toiled in secret at his *Christianismi Restitutio*, a book which would, he hoped, effect a reformation enormously superior to Calvin's, Luther's and Zwingli's. It would be true where their reformations had been false. Servetus's reformation was to redeem the world by the diffusion of genuine Christianity. For Servetus was never that "cyclopean despiser of the gospel" that Calvin in later days pilloried; and still less was he the bold free-thinker and atheist whom those that believe themselves



to be his followers sometimes extol to-day. Servetus always kept on the rails in religious matters. How earnestly he regarded himself as a pious Christian who must be prepared to stake his life for faith in the divine, is shown by the appeal in the preface to his book. "O Jesu Christe, Son of God, thou which art given us from heaven, reveal thyself to thy servant, that so great a revelation may become truly clear to us. It is thy cause which I, following an inward divine urge, have undertaken to defend. In former years I made a first attempt. Now, since the times are fulfilled, I am constrained to do so anew. Thou hast instructed us not to hide our light under a bushel. Woe unto me if I fail to proclaim the truth!"

The precautions taken by Servetus in the type-setting of this book show that the author was well aware of the dangers he was conjuring up by its publication. What a desperate undertaking for one who was physician in ordinary to an archbishop to issue, in a gossipy provincial town, a heretical book running to seven hundred pages. Not only the author, but also the publisher and the distributors, were staking their lives upon this foolhardy venture. Yet Servetus gladly devoted all that he had saved during his practice as physician to fire his hesitating collaborators. It was thought expedient to remove the printing press from its usual place to a remote house rented by the author solely for this purpose. There, in defiance of the Inquisition, the heretical theses were set up and printed by trustworthy persons who swore to guard the secret. The finished volume contained no sign to show where it had been printed or published. Servetus, however, disastrously for himself, left in the colophon, over the date, the identifying initials M.S.V. (Miguel Servetus Villanovus), thus giving the bloodhounds of the Inquisition an irrefutable proof of authorship.

Still, it was a work of supererogation for Servetus to betray himself thus, since his ruthless adversary, though apparently slumbering, was in reality kept awake by the spur of hatred. The elaborate organization for espionage which Calvin had established in Geneva—a network whose meshes grew continually finer—extended its operations into neighbouring lands, being in France even more effective than was the Holy Inquisition. Before Servetus's book had been actually published, when the thousand volumes were still warehoused in Lyons or were on their way to the Frankfort book-fair, when so few individual copies had been distributed that to-day only three have come down to us, Calvin was already in possession of one. The Genevese dictator at once addressed himself to the task of annihilating with a single stroke both the heretic and his writings.

Not many people are aware that Calvin opened his campaign against Servetus by a furtive attempt at "liquidation" of an adversary which was even more repulsive than the subsequent success on the plateau of Champel. For if, after the perusal of what he naturally regarded as an extremely heretical book, Calvin wanted to thrust his opponent into the clutches of the Inquisition, he might have chosen an open and honest way. It would have sufficed for him, from the pulpit, to warn Christendom against the book, and the familiars of the Inquisition would have discovered the author of this wicked work even though he lived within the shadow of the archiepiscopal palace. But the great reformer saved the papal authorities the trouble of looking for Servetus, and did so in the most perfidious way. Vainly do Calvin's apologists seek to defend him even in this; their attempts throw a most sinister light upon his character. Calvin, who in his personal behaviour was an honest zealot and a man animated by profoundly religious intentions, became unscrupulous whenever his doctrine was impugned,

## THE SERVETUS AFFAIR

or when the "cause" seemed to him at stake. For his dogma, for his party, he was ready (like Loyola) to approve any means that were effective. Almost as soon as Servetus's book was in his hands, one of Calvin's intimates, a French refugee named Guillaume Trie, wrote from Geneva, in February, 1553, to a cousin, Antoine Arneys—as fanatical a Catholic as he himself was a fanatical Protestant. In this letter Trie began by describing in general terms how effectively Protestant Geneva suppressed heretical intrigues, whereas in Catholic France these weeds were allowed to grow rankly. Then, what had opened as friendly chaff suddenly grew serious. In France, for instance, there was a heretic who ought to be burned the instant the authorities could lay hands on him ("*qui mérite bien d'être brûlé partout où il sera*").

Can we fail to be reminded of Calvin's "if he did come here, I would see to it that he should not leave the city alive." But Trie, Calvin's henchman, wrote even more plainly, disclosing the miscreant's name: "I refer to an Aragonese Spaniard, whose real name is Miguel Servetus, but who calls himself Michel de Villeneuve, and practises as a physician"; and he went on to give the title of Servetus's book, the table of contents, and a transcript of the first four pages. He concluded his letter with a lamentation concerning the sinfulness of the world.

This Genevese mine was skilfully laid to explode in the right place. Everything worked out as the informer had designed. The pious Catholic Arneys, beside himself with indignation, hurried off to show the letter to the ecclesiastical authorities of Lyons; and with equal speed the cardinal betook himself to the papal Inquisitor, Pierre Ory. The stone thus set rolling by Calvin reached the bottom of the hill with frightful momentum. The denunciation was sent from Geneva on February 27th, and on



March 16th Michel de Villeneuve was formally accused at Vienne.

It must have been a great disappointment to the zealous informers in Geneva that, after all, their mine missed fire. Some helpful person must have cut the fuse. Probably the archbishop of Vienne gave his physician in ordinary a timely hint. When the Inquisitor appeared in Vienne, the printing press had mysteriously disappeared; the journeyman printers solemnly swore that they had never set up or printed any such work; and the highly respected physician Villanovus indignantly repudiated his alleged identity with Miguel Servetus. Strangely enough, the Inquisition was content with having made a protest, and the remarkable forbearance of this terrible institution strengthens our belief that some powerful person must have extended a protective hand over the culprit. The ecclesiastical court, which usually began its work with the thumb-screw and the rack, left Villeneuve at large; the Inquisitor returned to Lyons, having effected nothing; and Arneys was informed that his accusation had proved unfounded. The Genevese attempt to get rid of Servetus by setting the Inquisition to work proved a failure. It is possible that the whole matter would have come to nothing had not Arneys applied to Geneva, begging his cousin Trie to supply additional and more damnatory material concerning the aforesaid heretic.

Up to now it might seem possible to suppose, if we wish to take a lenient view, that Trie acted on his own initiative in thus lodging a charge with his Catholic cousin about an author with whom he had no personal acquaintance: and that neither he nor Calvin had dreamed that their denunciation would leak through to the papal authorities. But now, when the machine of justice had been set in motion, and when the group of zealots in Geneva must know that Arneys was writing

to them for further information, not in idle curiosity, but under promptings from the Inquisition, they could not doubt the nature of the springes they were setting. Surely an evangelical pastor would shrink from playing the part of informer to the terrible authority which had roasted so many Protestants over a slow fire? But Servetus had good reason for thundering at Calvin: "Do you not realize that it ill becomes a servant of the gospel to make himself an official accuser, and to take advantage of his official position in order to set snares?"

Calvin, let me repeat, was unscrupulous when his doctrine was at stake. Servetus must be "liquidated"; and since Calvin was a good hater, he cared not a jot what means were employed. Nothing could have been more shameful than these means. Trie's second letter to Arneys, unquestionably dictated by Calvin, was a masterpiece of hypocrisy. The writer declared himself greatly astonished that his cousin had handed over the letter to the Inquisition. "It was intended only for your eye," he said. "I had no other object than to give you a demonstration how little zeal for the faith have those who style themselves pillars of the Church." But now, when he knew that the faggots had already been piled, instead of repudiating the idea of further activity on the part of the Inquisition, this contemptible informer went on to say unctuously that, since the mistake had already been made, there could be no doubt "God purposes to rid Christendom of this foul and deadly plague." What followed seems unbelievable. After dragging God's name in to cover an inhuman manifestation of human hatred, Trie sent his cousin the most compromising material he could find: letters penned by Servetus's own hand together with portions of the manuscript of the book. Now those who were to take sharp measures against a heretic could get quickly to work.

Letters in Servetus's own handwriting were sent. How

did Trie, who had never corresponded with Servetus, get hold of such letters? There is no possibility of glossing over this matter. We must bring Calvin, who wanted to remain in the background, out into the limelight. Servetus's letters, and some pages of the manuscript work, were those sent by Servetus to Calvin; and Calvin knew perfectly well for what purpose he took them out of his drawer. He knew to whom the documents would be sent; to those very "papists" against whom, from the pulpit, he daily fulminated as "Satan's spawn", and who were in the habit of torturing and burning his own disciples. He could not but know that the documents were needed to bring Servetus to the stake.

Vainly, therefore, did he subsequently endeavour to cover up his tracks, writing sophistically, "It is rumoured that I took steps to secure the arrest of Servetus by the familiars of the Inquisition; and some even say that it was dishonourable of me to hand him over to the deadly enemies of our faith and to fling him into the wolf's jaws. Let me ask my accusers how I could have suddenly got into touch with the pope's satellites. It is surely incredible that I could have any such associations, and that those who are to me as Belial was to Christ could have joined with me in a conspiracy." But the evasion is too palpable; for when Calvin asks naïvely, "How could I have suddenly got into touch with the pope's satellites?" the documents provide a clear and crushing answer. It was through the instrumentality of his friend Trie, who, in his letter to Arneys, frankly avows Calvin's collaboration. "I must admit that only with great pains was I able to secure from Monsieur Calvin the documents I enclose. I do not mean to imply that he is not convinced measures must be taken to suppress such abominable blasphemy, but that he considers it his duty to convince heretics by sound doctrine and not to attack them with the sword of justice." Fruitless, therefore, is the attempt (manifestly



at Calvin's instigation) of this clumsy correspondent to avert blame from the real offender, writing: "I was so importunate as to declare that if Monsieur Calvin would not help me, the reproach of bringing an unwarrantable charge would attach to me, unless he handed over to me the confirmatory material I enclose."

Actions are more impressive than words. Reluctantly or not, Calvin delivered over Servetus's private letters to the "pope's satellites," that they might be used for the destruction of their author. Calvin, and Calvin alone, was responsible for Trie's letter to Arneys (really a letter addressed to the Inquisition); Calvin alone enabled Trie to enclose the incriminatory material and to conclude his letter to Arneys with the following words: "I think I am sending you some irrefutable proofs, so that you will have no further difficulty in getting Servetus arrested and brought to trial."

It is on record that Cardinal de Tournon and Grand Master Ory burst into uproarious laughter when these irrefutable proofs of Servetus's guilt were forced upon their attention by their deadly enemy, the heretic Calvin. Indeed it is easy to understand why the princes of the Church were so delighted. Pious excuses might hide from us that Trie's motives were anything other than goodness of heart and gentleness and loyalty to his friend—but they cannot hide the preposterous fact that the leader of Protestantism was so accommodating as to help Catholic Inquisitors (of all persons) to burn a heretic. Such courtesies were not usually exchanged between the notables of the respective faiths, who, throughout the globe, were accustomed to use fire and sword, the gallows and the wheel, in the attempt to destroy one another. Anyhow, after this mirthful interlude, the Inquisitors devoted themselves to their task. Servetus was arrested and stringently examined. The letters and the fragments of manuscript supplied by Calvin furnished such over-

whelming proofs, that the defendant could no longer deny the authorship of the book, or that Michel de Villeneuve and Miguel Servetus were one and the same person. His cause was lost. The faggots were piled in Vienne, and soon the flames would rage.

For the second time, however, it appeared that Calvin's hope to rid himself of his arch-enemy by summoning other arch-enemies to his aid, was premature. Either Servetus, having made himself beloved as physician, possessed influential friends, or else (which is more probable) the ecclesiastical authorities preferred to be weary in well-doing for the very reason that Calvin was so eager to send this man to the stake. Anyhow, the gaolers were lax. Would it not be better to let an unimportant heretic escape than to please the heretic-in-chief in Geneva? Servetus was not closely guarded. The usual practice as regards heretics was to keep them in narrow cells, chained to the wall. Servetus enjoyed exceptional treatment. He was allowed to go for a walk in the garden every day, that he might breathe the fresh air. On April 7th, during one of these walks, the prisoner vanished, leaving for the head-gaoler nothing but a dressing-gown and the ladder by means of which the fugitive had climbed over the garden wall. Still, the faggots were not wasted, for, instead of the living Servetus, his effigy and five packages of the *Restitutio* were burned in the market-place at Vienne. The Genevese plan of using the hands of foreign fanatics to rid themselves of a foe, while they kept their own hands clean, had proved a fiasco. Henceforward Calvin would be an object of scorn in the eyes of all humane persons. He would have to accept full responsibility for continuing his campaign against Servetus, and for contriving a man's death for the sole reason that he detested the man's convictions.

## Chapter 5

### THE MURDER OF SERVETUS

FOR some months after his escape from prison, Servetus vanished without leaving a trace. It is unlikely that we shall ever learn what sufferings the hunted man endured until that August day when, upon a hired hack, he rode into Geneva, and put up at the Rose. Nor are we likely to find out why Servetus, prompted by an evil star ("*malis auspiciis appulsus*"), should have sought refuge in Geneva. Was it his intention to stay one night, and continue his flight by taking boat across the lake? Did he perhaps expect to conciliate his greatest enemy at a personal interview, since correspondence was unavailing? Or, perhaps, was his journey to Geneva one of those foolish actions characteristic of individuals whose nerves are overstrained; one of the pleasurable toying with danger not infrequent in persons whose situation is desperate? We do not know; probably we never shall know. None of the official reports of what happened in Geneva explains why Servetus came to the place where he could only expect the worst from Calvin.

But the unhappy fugitive did something even more foolish, more challenging. Almost immediately after his arrival, on the same Sunday morning, August 13, 1553, Servetus attended service at the cathedral of St. Pierre, where the whole Calvinist congregation was assembled, and where Calvin was to preach, Calvin, who could recognize Servetus, because the two had been students together long before in Paris. No reasonable explanation of such conduct is possible, save that some



mysterious compulsion, a fascination like that which brings a serpent's victims to their doom, must have been at work.

It was inevitable, in a town where every one spied on every one else, that a stranger should be the cynosure of all eyes. What ensued was likewise inevitable. Calvin recognized the ravening wolf among his pious flock, and inconspicuously gave orders to his minions. Servetus was arrested as he left the cathedral. Within an hour the fugitive was in chains. This arrest was a breach of international law, and also of the laws of hospitality generally accepted throughout the world. Servetus was not subject to Genevese jurisdiction, unless for an offence committed in that city. He was a foreigner, a Spaniard, who had only just arrived, and who had committed no crime which could justify his seizure. His books had been written and printed across the frontier, so that his heretical views could not have harmed any of the pious Genevese. Besides, a "preacher of God's word" had no right to order a man to be arrested and chained when no charge had been brought, and when no trial had taken place. From whatever angle we regard the matter, Calvin's seizure of Servetus was an outrageous exercise of dictatorial power, which, in its open contempt of laws and treaties, can only be compared to Napoleon's arrest and murder of the Duc d'Enghien. In this case, as in that, the arrest was to be followed, not by a properly constituted trial, but by an illegal homicide.

Servetus was arrested and thrown into prison without any charge having been brought against him. Surely then a charge must subsequently be invented? Would it not be logical to expect that the man who had instigated the arrest—"me auctore," "at my instigation," is Calvin's own admission—should himself come forward

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as Servetus's accuser? But the laws of Geneva were exemplary, and gave little encouragement to informers. They prescribed that any burgher who accused another of a crime should himself be arrested, and should be kept in prison until he had justified his accusation. Calvin, therefore, if he accused Servetus, would have to place himself at the disposal of the court. The theocratic dictator of Geneva did not relish the prospect. He would be in an unfortunate position if the Town Council were to declare Servetus not guilty, and if he himself were to remain under arrest for having brought an unjustifiable charge. What a blow that would be to his prestige, and what a triumph for his adversary. Calvin, diplomatic as ever, assigned to his secretary—or cook—Nicolaus de la Fontaine, the thankless task of accuser. The worthy Nicolaus went quietly to prison instead of his master, after he had handed the authorities an indictment consisting of twenty-three points (a document compiled, of course, by Calvin). Such was the comedy which served as curtain-raiser to a horrible tragedy. After a gross breach of law, the affair was given a legal complexion. Servetus was examined, and the various counts of the indictment were read aloud to him. His answers were calm and shrewd, for his energies had not yet been undermined by long imprisonment. Point by point, he rejected the accusations. For instance, in answer to the charge that he had attacked Calvin in his writings, Servetus declared this to be erroneous, for the attack had opened on Calvin's side, and all that he, Servetus, had done was to reply that Calvin was not infallible. If Calvin accused him of obstinately sticking to certain theses, he could rejoin that Calvin was no less stubborn. All that was at odds between Calvin and himself was a difference of opinion about certain theological matters, with which a secular court had no concern; and if Calvin had nevertheless arrested him, this had been

the outcome of spite. The leader of Protestantism had denounced him to the Inquisition, and if this preacher of God's word had had his way, he (Servetus) would have been burned long ago.

The legality of Servetus's contentions was so indubitable that the prevailing mood of the Council was very much in his favour, and it seemed likely that there would be no harsher decision than the issue of an order for deportation. Calvin, however, got wind of the fact that things were going well for Servetus, and he feared that in the end his victim might give him the slip. On August 17th, the dictator appeared before the Town Council and took a line which made an end of the pretence of non-participation. He showed his colours, no longer denying that he was Servetus's accuser; and he begged leave of the Council to attend the proceedings henceforward, on the pretext that "thus the accused could be better convinced of his errors." Calvin's real reason obviously was the wish to throw his whole influence into the scale in order to prevent his victim's escape.

From the moment when Calvin autocratically thrust himself in between the accused and the judges, Servetus's cause was lost. Calvin, a trained logician and learned jurist, was much more competent to press home the charge than his servant de la Fontaine had been; and Servetus's confidence was shaken. The Spaniard was obviously unmanned now that his enemy sat among the judges, cold, severe, making a pretence of dispassionateness, as he asked one question after another—but, as Servetus felt in the marrow of his bones, moved by an iron determination to send the accused to doom. The defenceless man grew irritable, nervous, aggressive, bitter, and wrathful. Instead of tranquilly sticking to his legal standpoint, instead of insisting that as a foreigner he was not subject to Genevese jurisdiction unless he had broken the laws of the town, he allowed Calvin to entice



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him on to the treacherous ground of theological discussion, thus giving abundant justification for the charge of heresy. For even one of his contentions, such as that the devil likewise was part of the substance of God, sufficed to make the pious councillors shudder. But as soon as his philosophical vanity had been affronted, Servetus showed no restraint in the expressions he used about the thorniest and most dangerous problems, forgetting that the councillors were not able theologians before whom he could unconcernedly expound the truth. His very eloquence, his eagerness for discussion, made Servetus suspect to his judges. More and more they inclined to Calvin's view, that this foreigner, who, with gleaming eyes and clenched fists, railed against the doctrines of their Church, must be a dangerous disturber of the spiritual peace, and was probably an incurable heretic. Anyhow it was a good thing that he was being subjected to thorough examination. The court decided that he should remain under arrest, while his accuser, Nicolaus de la Fontaine, was to be set at liberty. Calvin had got his way and wrote joyfully to a friend: "I hope he will be condemned to death."

Why was Calvin so eager to obtain a capital sentence upon Servetus? Why was he not satisfied with the more modest triumph of having his adversary expelled the country, or humiliated in some similar way? Calvin did not detest Servetus more than he detested Castellio, and every one who defied his authority. He loathed all those who tried to teach others in a different way from that which he advocated, such a detestation being instinctive in a man of his tyrannical disposition. So here, if he was particularly enraged against Servetus and wished to take extreme measures at this particular moment, his motives were not private but political. The rebel against his authority, this Miguel Servetus, was to be the scapegoat for another opponent of Calvin's orthodoxy, the

sometime Dominican monk, Hieronymus Bolsec, whom he had also tried to destroy as a heretic, and who, greatly to his annoyance, had escaped. Bolsec, generally respected as family doctor to the leading patricians in Geneva, had openly attacked the weakest and most vulnerable point of Calvin's teaching, the rigid doctrine of predestination, using the argument which Erasmus had used against Luther. It was impossible, declared both these "heretics," that God, as the principle of all good, could wittingly and willingly impel human beings to perform their worst deeds. Every one knows how infuriated Luther was by Erasmus's reasoning; and what a flood of abuse the most noted champion of the Reformation, this master of coarse invective, let loose against the elderly sage. Still, rough, ill-tempered, and violent as Luther was, he nevertheless adduced logical considerations against Erasmus, and never thought of having Erasmus haled before a secular court for challenging the doctrine of predestination. Calvin, with his mania of infallibility, regarded and treated every adversary as a heretic, objections to his religious doctrine being for him equivalent to a crime against the State. Instead, therefore, of answering Bolsec with theological arguments, he had his critic clapped into gaol.

Unexpectedly, however, his attempt to make a terrible example of Hieronymus Bolsec was a failure. There were too many in Geneva who knew the learned physician to be a god-fearing man; and, just as in the Castellio affair, so also in that of Bolsec, Calvin's behaviour aroused the suspicion that he desired to rid himself of one who was not completely subject to his will, that he might reign henceforward alone in Geneva. Bolsec's plaint penned while in prison, passed from hand to hand in numerous manuscript copies; and, despite Calvin's clamours, the Town Council was afraid of condemning the prisoner for heresy. To evade this painful decision,

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they declared themselves incompetent to deal with religious matters, and refused to transcend their powers by adjudicating in a theological affair. At any rate, the councillors declared, in this thorny question they must demand the formal opinion of the other Reformed Churches of Switzerland. This demand was Bolsec's salvation, for the Reformed Churches of Zurich, Berne, and Basle—being, under the rose, ready enough to give their fanatical colleague in Geneva a set-back—unanimously declined to regard Bolsec's utterances as blasphemous. The accused was acquitted by the Town Council: Calvin was refused his victim, and had to content himself with the municipal authority's decree that Bolsec should leave the town.

Nothing but a new and successful charge of heresy could make people forget that Calvin's theological supremacy had been successfully impugned. A victory over Servetus must compensate the dictator for his failure to make an end of Bolsec; and against Servetus the chances of success were enormously more favourable. Servetus was a foreigner. He had not, like Castellio and Bolsec, many friends, admirers, and helpers in Geneva. Besides, the reformed clergy everywhere had for years been outraged by his bold attacks on the Trinity and by his challenging ways. It would be much easier to make an example of this outsider who had no backing. From the first, the trial was pre-eminently political; was a question of whether Calvin was or was not to rule; was a tug of war to show whether he would be able to enforce his will as spiritual dictator. If Calvin had wanted nothing more than to rid himself of Servetus as a private and theological adversary, he could have done so easily enough. Hardly had the Geneva inquiry opened, when an envoy from the French judicial authorities arrived, to demand the handing over to Vienne of a refugee already sentenced in France, where the scaffold was



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ready for him. What a splendid opportunity for Calvin to play the magnanimous, and nevertheless to rid himself of this hated adversary. The Town Council of Geneva need merely approve the extradition, and, as far as Geneva was concerned, the tiresome affair of Servetus would be over and done with. For centuries the odium of condemning and burning this independent thinker would attach to the Catholic Inquisition. Calvin, however, opposed extradition. For him, Servetus was not a subject, but an object, with whose aid he would give an indubitable demonstration of the inviolability of his own doctrine. Servetus was to be a symbol, not a man. The French emissary, therefore, was sent back unsatisfied. The Protestant dictator intended to have the trial carried through under his own jurisdiction, that all and sundry might be convinced how disastrous it was to contradict Maître Calvin.

Calvin's friends in Geneva, as well as his enemies, were not slow to realize that the Servetus case was nothing more than a test of the dictator's power. Naturally, therefore, friends as well as foes did what they could to prevent Calvin's getting his way. To the rival groups of politicians, the unhappy Servetus was nothing more than an instrument, a crowbar with which the tyrant could, perhaps, be unseated. Little did any of them care whether this crowbar would break in their hands. Those who were most friendly to Servetus, did their protégé a very bad turn, for the false reports they circulated served only to increase Servetus's hysterical exaltation; and their secret missives to the prisoner urging the latter to stiffen his resistance could not fail to work mischief. All that interested them was to make the trial as sensational as possible. The more Servetus defended himself, the more rabid his onslaught on Calvin, the better.

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Really, alas, there was no need to incite Servetus to fill the cup of his heedlessness. The hardships of his long imprisonment inflamed the wrath of a man already prone to neurotic frenzy, since, as Calvin could not but know, Servetus had been treated with refined harshness. For weeks, though in his own eyes he was innocent, he was kept like a condemned murderer in a cold and damp cell, with irons on hands and feet. His clothes hung in rags upon his freezing body; he was not provided with a change of linen. The most primitive demands of hygiene were disregarded. No one might tender him the slightest assistance. In his bitter need, Servetus petitioned the Council for more humane treatment, writing: "Fleas are devouring me; my shoes are torn to pieces; I have nothing clean to wear."

A secret hand (we cannot but guess whose hand it was that gave the screw-press another turn) interfered when the Council proposed to better Servetus's lot. The upshot was that this bold thinker and independent scholar was left to languish in his cell as a mangy dog might have been left to die upon a dunghill. Still more lamentable were the cries of distress uttered in a second letter, dated a few weeks later, when the prisoner was, literally, being suffocated in his own excrement. "I beg of you, for the love of Christ, not to refuse me what you would give to a Turk or a criminal. Nothing has been done to fulfil your orders that I should be kept clean. I am in a more pitiful condition than ever. It is abominably cruel that I should be given no chance of attending to my bodily needs."

Still, nothing was done! Can we be surprised that when, once more, he was brought into court out of his befouled lair, he should explode with fury? This man in irons, clad in stinking rags, was confronted by his arch-adversary on the judge's seat; by Calvin, wearing a spruce, black gown, calm and cool, thoroughly prepared

for the fray after a good rest; by Calvin with whom the prisoner now wished to discuss matters, mind against mind, scholar against scholar; by Calvin, who reviled Servetus as a criminal and an assassin? Was it not inevitable that Servetus, teased by the basest and most malicious questions and insinuations relating to the most private affairs of his sexual life, angered and tormented, should lose his self-control, and answer the outrageous queries with invectives, should rail coarsely against his accuser? Servetus was wearied beyond endurance by sleepless nights. Now the man to whom he owed so much inhuman treatment had to listen to a volley of abuse.

"Do you deny that you are an assassin? I will prove it by your actions. As regards myself, I confide in the justice of my cause and am not afraid of death. But you scream like a blind man in the desert, because the passion for vengeance burns in your heart. You lied, you lied, ignorant calumniator that you are. Wrath boils up within you when you are hounding any one to death. Would that all your magic were still hidden away within your mother's womb, so that I could have a chance to recount your errors."

In this outburst of wrath, the unhappy Servetus forgot the powerlessness of his position. His chains clanking, foaming at the mouth, he demanded of the Council, of his judges, that, instead of condemning him, they should pass sentence upon Calvin the law-breaker, upon the Genevese dictator.

"Magician that he is, you should not only find him guilty and sentence him, but should banish him from your city, while his property should be made over to me in compensation for mine, which, through him, I have lost."

It need hardly be said that the worthy councillors were horrified at such words and at the spectacle before



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them; that of a lean, pallid, emaciated man, with a tangled beard, who, with glowing eyes and speaking foreigner's French, hurled abominable accusations at their Christian leader. They could not but consider him a man possessed, a man driven by the promptings of Satan. From hearing to hearing, their feelings towards him grew more and more unfavourable. Really the trial was over, and nothing left but to condemn the accused. But Calvin's masked enemies wanted the affair to be long drawn out, still doing their utmost to deprive the dictator of the triumph he would secure from the condemnation of his adversary. Once more they did their utmost to save Servetus, arranging, as in Bolsec's case, to secure the opinion of the other Swiss Reformed synods, actuated by the secret hope that in this instance, likewise, the victim of Calvin's dogmatism would be torn from the zealot's claws.

Calvin, however, was only too well aware that his authority was shaken and might fall. It was essential for him to avoid a second reverse. He took measures accordingly, despatching, while his victim still rotted in prison, missive after missive to the synods of Zurich, Basle, Berne, and Schaffhausen, to influence the opinions of these bodies. Messengers were speeded to all points of the compass; friends were set in motion to warn his colleagues against helping so wicked a blasphemer to escape judgment. He was aided in his machinations by the fact that Servetus was known to be a disturber of the theological peace, and that since the days of Zwingli and Bucer, the "impudent Spaniard" had been loathed throughout Protestant Europe. The result was that the Swiss synods unanimously pronounced Servetus's views to be erroneous and wicked. Even though not one of the four religious communities frankly demanded or even

approved capital punishment, they nevertheless endorsed on principle any severe measures that might be taken.

Zurich wrote: "We leave it to your wisdom to decide how this man should be punished." Berne answered that the judges in Geneva should "borrow the spirit of wisdom and strength," so that their Church and the other Swiss Churches should be well served, and they should all be freed "from this plague." Still the reference to settling the matter by violence was weakened by the exhortation: "We trust that you will decide to act in such a way as to do nothing which might seem unbecoming to Christian municipal authorities." Not one of those whose counsel Calvin sought, ventured openly to urge the passing of a death sentence. Nevertheless, since the Churches had approved the legal proceedings against Servetus, Calvin felt they would also approve the inevitable sequel; for, by their studied ambiguity, they left him a free hand. Whenever Calvin's hand was free, it struck hard and resolutely. Vainly now did those who secretly desired to help Servetus, endeavour at the last hour, when the opinions of the synods had been sent in, to try to avert the doom. Perrin and other republicans proposed an appeal to the Council of Two Hundred, the supreme authority. But it was too late; even Calvin's opponents felt it would be perilous to resist. On October 26th, by a majority vote of the Small Council sitting as High Court of Criminal Justice, Servetus was sentenced to be burned alive, this cruel verdict to take effect next day on the plateau of Champel.

Week after week, Servetus, shut away from the outer world, had indulged in extravagant hopes. He was a highly imaginative man; he had been yet more disordered by the whisperings of his alleged friends, and he

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clung more and more desperately to the illusion that he had convinced his judges of the soundness of his theses; so he felt assured that within a few days Calvin, the usurper, would be shamefully expelled from Geneva. How terrible was his awakening, when, with an inscrutable expression, the secretary of the Council entered his cell early in the morning of the 27th and ceremoniously unrolled a parchment to read the sentence. Servetus was thunderstruck. He listened as if unable to understand the words which informed him that this day he was to be burned alive as a blasphemer. For a few minutes he stood as if deaf and unconscious. Then the unhappy man's nerves gave way. He began to sob and to groan, until at length in his Spanish mother-tongue he cried aloud: "Misericordias!" His arrogance gave way before these terrible tidings. Crushed, almost annihilated, he succumbed to overwhelming discouragement. The domineering preachers, likewise a prey to illusion, believed that the hour had come in which, after gaining a secular triumph over Servetus, they would gain a spiritual triumph as well, that despair would wring from the prisoner a voluntary avowal of error.

Yet, marvellously enough, as soon as the poor, broken wretch was asked to repudiate his theses, as soon as his innermost faith was challenged, his pride flamed up anew. If his body was to be burned, his body was to be burned; but he would not abate a tittle of his beliefs; and during the last hours the knight errant of science rose to the stature of a martyr and hero of conviction. Though Farel hastened over from Lausanne to share in Calvin's triumph, Servetus contemptuously rejected Farel's promptings, declaring that a secular legal decision could never be accepted as proof of a man's rightness or wrongness in divine concerns. You might murder a man without convincing him. His mind had not been convicted of error, though his body was to be put to death. Neither



by threats nor by promises, could Farel extract from the chained and doomed victim as much as a word of recantation. Still, since he held firmly to his conviction that he was no heretic but a believing Christian whose duty it was to reconcile himself even with the fiercest of his enemies, Servetus expressed a wish to see Calvin.

The only report of Calvin's visit is Calvin's own. Dead men tell no tales. Calvin's report of Calvin's behaviour admirably discloses Calvin's rigidity and harshness. The triumphant dictator came down into the victim's cold, dank, and dark cell, not to offer consolation, not to say a brotherly or Christian word of kindness to him who was about to die in torment. Quietly, in the most matter of fact way, Calvin opened the conversation by asking why Servetus had summoned him. Plainly he expected Servetus to kneel, to urge from the almighty dictator a cancelment, or at least a mitigation of the sentence. Servetus answered simply, so that any one with a human heart in his breast must be touched by the record, that his only object in sending for Calvin had been to beg forgiveness. The victim offered reconciliation to the inquisitor who had sent him to his doom. Calvin, however, stony of visage, could never regard a political and religious opponent as either a Christian or a man.

Read the words of his frigid report :

"My only answer was to say that I had never (this being the truth) regarded him with personal animus."

Calvin could not or would not understand the eminently peaceful nature of Servetus's last gesture. There could, said Calvin, be no reconciliation between him and Servetus. The latter must cease thinking of his own person, and frankly acknowledge his errors, his sinfulness towards God, whose trinitarian nature the condemned man had denied. Wittingly or unwittingly the ideologist in Calvin refused to recognize as a man and a brother this poor wretch, who that day would be com-

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mitted like a worthless billet to the flames. As a rigid dogmatist, he could see in Servetus nothing more than one who had rejected his (Calvin's) conception of God, and thus had denied God. The only use Calvin wanted to make of his dictatorial power was to extract from Servetus during these last hours the avowal that Servetus was wrong and Calvin right. Since, however, Servetus recognized that this iron zealot wanted to deprive him of the only thing still left alive in his wasted body, that which the prisoner regarded as the immortal part of him—his faith, his conviction—Servetus stubbornly resisted, and resolutely refused to make the cowardly avowal. He had voluntarily declared his willingness to become reconciled with his adversary, man to man, Christian to Christian; but nothing would induce him, whose life was counted by minutes, to sacrifice the convictions to whose advocacy he had devoted a lifetime. The attempt at conversion failed. To Calvin it seemed that further speech was needless. One who in religious matters would not unhesitatingly comply with Calvin's will, was no longer Calvin's brother in Christ, but only one of Satan's brood, a sinner on whom friendly words would be wasted. Why show a trace of kindness to a heretic? Calvin turned away leaving his victim without a syllable and without a friendly glance. Here are the words with which this fanatical accuser closes his report, words which condemn him for all eternity: "Since I could achieve nothing by argument and warning, I did not wish to be wiser than my Master. I followed the rule laid down by St. Paul, and withdrew from the heretic who had passed judgment on himself."

Death at the stake by roasting with a slow fire is the most agonizing of all modes of execution. Even the Middle Ages, famous for cruelty, seldom carried out this punishment to an extremity. In most cases those sentenced to such a fate were not left to the mercy of the

flames. They were strangled, or benumbed in some way. But this abominable death had been decreed for the first heretic sentenced to it by Protestants; and we can well understand that Calvin, when a cry of indignation rose from the humane persons still left in the world, would endeavour, long afterwards, very long afterwards, to shuffle off the responsibility for the exceptional cruelty of Servetus's execution. He and the other members of the Consistory, so he tells us years after Servetus's body had been reduced to ashes, tried to secure that the sentence of death by slow fire should be commuted into the milder one of death by the sword. Their labours had been vain. (*"Genus mortis conati sumus mutare, sed frustra."*) In the minutes of the Council, we cannot find a word about such frustrated endeavours; and what unprejudiced person will believe that Calvin who, throughout the trial, had put the screw upon the Council to pass a death sentence on Servetus, and had gained his end, should have suddenly become no more than an uninfluential private citizen in Geneva, and should have been unable to ensure a more merciful method of execution? As far as the latter is concerned it is true that Calvin had contemplated a mitigation of the sentence—but only if Servetus were to purchase this mitigation by a spiritual sacrifice, by a last hour recantation. Not from human kindliness, but from crude political calculation, Calvin would then, for the first time in his life, have shown himself gentle to an adversary. What a triumph it would have been for Genevese doctrine, if Servetus just before going to the stake, had admitted himself to be wrong, and Calvin to be right. What a victory to have compelled the Spanish blasphemer to acknowledge that he was not dying on behalf of his own doctrine but must admit before the whole population that Calvin's was the only true doctrine in the world.

Servetus, however, knew the price he would have to



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pay for any concession. Stubbornness was faced by stubbornness, fanaticism by fanaticism. He would rather die in unspeakable torment on behalf of his convictions than secure a more merciful death to favour the dogmas of Maître Jehan Calvin. He would rather suffer agonies for half an hour, winning thereby the crown of martyrdom, and attaching to Calvin for all time the stigma of utter barbarism. Servetus bluntly refused to comply, rallying his forces to endure his awful fate.

The rest is a tale of horror. On October 27th, at eleven in the morning, the prisoner was brought out of prison in his befouled rags. He was looking his last, with blinking eyes, at the light of day. His beard tangled, his visage dirty and wasted, his chains rattling, he tottered as he walked, and his ashen tint was ghastly on that clear autumn day. In front of the steps of the Town Hall, the officers of the law, having hustled him along (since weeks of inaction had almost robbed him of the power of walking), thrust him on to his knees. With lowered head, he listened to the sentence, which a syndic now read aloud to the assembled populace. It ended with the words: "We condemn thee, Miguel Servetus, to be conveyed in bonds to Champel, there to be burned alive, and with thee the manuscript of thy book and the printed volume, until thy body is consumed to ashes. Thus shalt thou end thy days, as a warning to all others who might wish to repeat thine offence."

The doomed man's teeth chattered with cold as he listened. In his extremity, he crawled on his knees nearer to the municipal authorities, assembled on the steps, and implored that by their grace he might be decapitated before his body was burned, "lest the agony should drive me to repudiate the convictions of a lifetime." If he had sinned, he went on, it had been unwittingly; for he

had always been impelled by the one thought of promoting the divine honour.

At this moment, Farel pushed between the judges and the kneeling man. In a voice that could be heard far and wide, he asked whether Servetus was prepared to renounce the teaching he had directed against the Trinity, and thus to secure the boon of a milder form of execution. Servetus, however, though in most respects he was but a mediocre man, contemptuously rejected this offer, thus showing his moral greatness, his willingness to fulfil his pledge, his determination to suffer the worst on behalf of his convictions.

Now the procession moved on towards the place of execution. It was led by the lord lieutenant and his deputy, wearing the insignia of their rank and surrounded by a guard of archers. The crowd, eager for sensation, followed. All the way across the city, past numerous affrighted and silent spectators, Farel clung to the side of the condemned man, keeping step with Servetus, whom he continually asked for an acknowledgment of error and for repudiation of false doctrine. When Servetus, with genuine piety, answered that, though he was being put to death unjustly, he nevertheless implored God to be merciful to his accuser, Farel replied with dogmatic wrath: "What? After having committed the most abominable sin, do you still try to justify it? If you remain obstinate I shall leave you to God's judgment, and shall go no further beside you, although I had determined not to leave you before you should draw your last breath." Servetus made no further reply. He was nauseated by the executioners and the disputatious theologians, and would not vouchsafe them another word. Unceasingly this alleged heretic and atheist murmured, as if for his own comfort: "O God,

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save my soul, O Jesus, Son of the Eternal God, have pity on me." Then uplifting his voice, he begged all present to pray with him and for him. On reaching the place of execution, within sight of the stake, he kneeled once more to collect his thoughts in pious meditation. But the fanatical Farel, fearing lest this pure-hearted demeanour of a reputed heretic might make an impression upon the people, cried to them over the head of the condemned: "You see what power Satan possesses when he has a man in his claws! This fellow is most learned, and believed himself to be acting rightly. But now he is in Satan's grip and the like may happen to any of you."

Meanwhile the loathsome preparations were begun. The wood was piled round the stake to which the clanking chains had been nailed. The executioner bound the victim's hands. Then Farel, for the last time, pressed nearer to Servetus, who was only sighing, "O God, my God," and shouted fiercely: "Have you nothing more to say?" The contentious pastor still hoped that the sight of the post where he was to endure martyrdom would convince Servetus that the Calvinist faith was the only true one. But Servetus answered: "What else can I do than call on God?"

The disappointed Farel quitted his victim. Now it only remained for the other executioner, the official one, to perform his hateful task. The chains attached to the stake were wound four or five times around it and around the poor wretch's wasted body. Between this and the chains, the executioner's assistants then inserted the book and the manuscript which Servetus had sent to Calvin under seal to ask Calvin's fraternal opinion upon it. Finally, in scorn, there was pressed upon the martyr's brow a crown of leaves impregnated with sulphur. The preliminaries were over. The executioner kindled the faggots and the murder began.



When the flames rose around him, Servetus uttered so dreadful a cry that many of the onlookers turned their eyes away from the pitiful sight. Soon the smoke interposed a veil in front of the writhing body, but the yells of agony grew louder and louder, until at length came an imploring scream: "Jesus, Son of the everlasting God, have pity on me!" The struggle with death lasted half an hour. Then the flames abated, the smoke dispersed, and attached to the blackened stake there remained, above the glowing embers, a black, sickening, charred mass, a loathsome jelly, which had lost human semblance. What had once been a thinking earthly creature, passionately straining towards the eternal, what had been a breathing fragment of the divine soul, was now reduced to a vestige so offensive, so repulsive, that surely the sight of it might have made even Calvin aware how inhuman had been his conduct in arrogating to himself the right of becoming judge and slayer of one of his brethren.

But where was Calvin in this fearful hour? Either to show himself disinterested or else to spare his nerves from shock, he had remained at home. He was in his study, windows closed, having left to the executioner and to Farel (a coarser brute than himself) the odious task of witnessing the execution. So long as no more was needed than to track down an innocent man, to accuse him, browbeat him, and bring him to the stake, Calvin had been an indefatigable leader. But in the hour of performance, he left matters to Farel and the paid assistants, while he himself, the man who had really willed and commanded this "pious murder," kept discreetly aloof. Next Sunday, however, clad in his black cassock, he entered the pulpit to boast of the deed before a silent congregation, declaring it to have been a great deed and a just one, although he had not dared to watch the pitiful spectacle.

## Chapter 6

### MANIFESTO ON BEHALF OF TOLERATION

To seek truth and to utter what one believes to be true, can never be a crime. No one must be forced to accept a conviction. Conviction is free.

—SEBASTIAN CASTELLIO, 1551.

IT was immediately recognized that the burning of Servetus had brought the Reformation to and beyond a parting of the ways. In a century disfigured by innumerable acts of violence, the execution of one man more might have seemed a trifling incident. Between the coasts of Spain and those of the lands bordering on the North Sea (not excepting the British Isles), Christians burned countless heretics for the greater glory of Christ. By thousands and tens of thousands, in the name of the "true Church" (the names were legion), defenceless human beings were haled to the place of execution, there to be burned, decapitated, strangled, or drowned. "If those thus butchered had been, I will not say horses, but only swine," we read in Castellio's *De haereticis*, "every prince would have considered he had sustained a grave loss." But, since only men and women were slain, no one troubled to count the victims. "I doubt," groans Castellio, "whether, in any epoch of the world's history, so much blood can have been shed as in our own."

But throughout the centuries, among numberless atrocities, it has always been one which might have seemed no worse than the others, that pricked apparently slumbering consciences. The flames which destroyed

the martyred Servetus were a beacon overtopping all others at that day; and, two centuries later, Gibbon declared that this one sacrifice had scandalized him more deeply than the burning of hecatombs by the Inquisition. For, to quote Voltaire, the execution of Servetus was the first "religious murder" committed by the Reformation, and the first plain repudiation of the primary idea of that great movement. In and by itself, the very notion of "heretic" is absurd as far as a Protestant Church is concerned, since Protestants demand that every one shall have the right of interpretation. Thus, at the outset, Luther, Zwingli, and Melanchthon, declared themselves strongly opposed to the use of forcible measures against those who stood in the wings of their movement and tended to exaggerate its purposes. Here are Luther's own words: "I have little love for death sentences, even though well deserved; what alarms me in this matter is the example that is set. I can, therefore, by no means approve that false doctors shall be put to death." In his pithy way he went on to say: "Heretics must not be suppressed or held down by physical force, but only combated by the word of God. For heresy is a spiritual affair, which cannot be washed away by earthly fire or earthly water." Zwingli was, if possible, even more emphatic in his repudiation of any appeal to the secular arm in such cases, and of any use of force.

Soon, however, the champions of the new doctrine, which had meanwhile established itself as a "Church," had to recognize what the authorities of the old Church had long known—namely, that in the long run power cannot be maintained without force. Consequently, to avoid coming to a decision (which could not really be avoided), Luther suggested a compromise, trying to distinguish between "heresy" and "sedition"; between "remonstrants," who only differed from the opinion of the Reformed Church in spiritual and religious matters,



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and "rebels," real "disturbers of the peace," who, while challenging the established religious order, wanted also to change the social order. As regards these last, by whom he meant the communistically inclined Anabaptists, he approved the official use of force as a means of suppression. But not one of the early leaders of the Reformed Church could bring himself to the decisive step of delivering over to the executioner any who might hold other opinions than his own and might style themselves freethinkers. Too recent were the days when religious revolutionaries had battled against pope and emperor on behalf of their convictions, and had been proclaimed the champions of the most sacred rights of man. The establishment of a Protestant Inquisition seemed at the outset unthinkable.

But that was the epochal step taken by Calvin when he burned Servetus. Thereby he made short work of the "*Freiheit des Christenmenschen*" (freedom of the Christian man), which had been fought for by the Reformation; he outstripped the Catholic Church, which to its honour had for more than a thousand years hesitated to burn any one alive simply because he insisted upon interpreting Christian dogmas in his own way. But Calvin, in the second decade of his personal dominion, established his spiritual tyranny by burning alive one who challenged it; and, from the moral outlook, this deed was perhaps more abominable than all the misdeeds of Torquemada. Servetus was not slain as an atheist, for he had never been that; he was martyred because he had repudiated some of Calvin's theses. When, hundreds of years later, the free city of Geneva erected a monument to the freethinker Servetus, it vainly endeavoured to exculpate Calvin by describing Servetus as a "victim of his epoch." Montaigne was of that time, and so was Castellio. It was not the blindness and folly of his day which sent Servetus to the stake, but the personal despot-

ism of Calvin. Unfaith and superstition may be expressions of an era; but for a particular misdemeanour, he alone is responsible who commits the offence.

Indignation grew rapidly from the first hour after Servetus's martyrdom, and even de Bèze, Calvin's official apologist, had to admit: "The ashes of the unhappy man were not yet cold when acrimonious discussion arose on the question whether heretics ought to be punished. Some hold that they must indeed be suppressed, but not by capital punishment. Others want to leave them to God's punishment." We see that de Bèze, though his general inclination was to glorify whatever Calvin did, was extremely hesitant here; and still more dubious were Calvin's other friends. Melancthon, who had himself railed savagely against Servetus, wrote to his "dear brother" as follows: "The Church thanks you, and will thank you in days to come. The Genevese officials acted rightly when they condemned this blasphemer to death." There was even to be found a scholar and zealot named Musculus to compose a pæan on the occasion—perpetual "*trahison des clercs*." But these were the only voices of hearty approval. Zurich, Schaffhausen, and the other synods were far less enthusiastic than Geneva had hoped. Although, on principle, they may have thought it well that "over-zealous" sectarians should be intimidated, they were unquestionably glad that the first Protestant "act of faith," the first destruction of a Nonconformist, had not taken place within their own walls, and that Jehan Calvin would have to bear the odium of this terrible decision.

But if these co-religionists did no more than damn with faint praise, adverse voices speedily made themselves heard. The most distinguished jurist of the day, François Baudouin, uttered a decisive opinion. "I hold that Calvin had no right to open a criminal prosecution over a point of religious doctrine." Not merely were the free-

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thinking humanists throughout Europe outraged; many of the Protestant clergy likewise expressed disapproval. Barely an hour's walk from the gates of Geneva, and protected from Calvin's minions by Bernese overlordship, the Vaud clergy declared in the pulpit that Calvin's treatment of Servetus had been irreligious and illegal. In Geneva itself, Calvin had to call in the aid of the police to repress criticism. A woman who publicly declared Servetus to be a martyr for the sake of Jesus Christ, was imprisoned; and so was a book printer for maintaining that the town authorities had condemned Servetus at the will and pleasure of one man. Some noted scholars of foreign nationality pointedly shook the dust from their feet as they hastened to quit a city where they no longer felt safe since a despotism had been established which was a menace to freedom of thought. Soon Calvin was forced to recognize that the martyrdom of Servetus had been much more dangerous to the dictatorship than had been the Spanish scholar's life and writings.

Calvin had a sensitive ear for any sort of contradiction. Careful though the Genevese were, under his regime, to mind their p's and q's, murmurs that found their way through keyholes and closed windows made the dictator realize that his fellow-burghers were restraining their wrath with difficulty. Still, the deed had been done. God Almighty Himself could not make it undone. Since to escape the consequences of his actions was impossible, the best thing for Calvin was to put a bold front on the matter and blazon his responsibility. Despite himself, and inconspicuously, Calvin, who had begun with a cheerful offensive, was forced into the defensive. Friends unanimously assured him that it behoved him to find justifications for the "act of faith" thanks to which Servetus had been consigned to the



flames. Somewhat reluctantly, therefore, he made up his mind to "enlighten" the world about Servetus and to compose an apologia for having slain that heretic.

But, in the Servetus affair, Calvin had an uneasy conscience; and a man with an uneasy conscience, try though he may to stifle his doubts, writes poor stuff. Naturally, therefore, his apologia, entitled *Defence of the True Faith and of the Trinity against the dreadful errors of Servetus*, a book which, as Castellio said, the dictator wrote "when his hands were still dripping with the blood of Servetus," was one of the weakest of his writings. Calvin himself admitted that he penned it "*tumultuarie*"—that is to say, nervously, and in haste. How uncertain of his own position he felt, when thus forced to assume the defensive, is shown by the fact that he got all the pastors in Geneva to sign the manifesto as well as himself, so that others might share the responsibility. He found it disagreeable to be regarded as instigator to the murder of Servetus, with the result that the two opposing trends are clumsily mingled in the pronunciamiento. On the one hand, warned by the widespread discontent, Calvin wished to shuffle responsibility on to the "authorities"; but on the other hand he had to prove that the Town Council had been perfectly right in destroying such a "monster" as the Spaniard. He presented himself as the mildest-mannered of men, as inveterately opposed to violence of any kind, filling the greater part of his book with complaints of the cruelty of the Catholic Inquisition, which sentenced true believers without giving them a chance to defend themselves, and then had them executed in the most barbarous way. ("What about you?" he would later be asked by Castellio. "Whom did you appoint to defend Servetus?") He went on to astonish his readers by informing them that he had, in secret, done his utmost to bring Servetus to a better frame of mind. ("*Je n'ai pas cessé de faire mon possible, en secret, pour*

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*le ramener à des sentiments plus saints.*") It had really been the Town Council, he declared, which, despite his inclination towards leniency, had insisted upon the death-sentence, and upon one of such peculiar cruelty. These alleged efforts of Calvin on behalf of Servetus, of the murderer on behalf of his victim, were "so secret," that not a soul was found to believe a legend invented out of whole cloth. Castellio contemptuously marshals the facts. "The first of your 'exhortations' was nothing but invective; the second was, to commit Servetus to prison, where the Spaniard was not to leave until on his way to the stake where he was burned alive."

While thus with one hand he waved away his personal responsibility for the martyrdom of Servetus, with the other hand Calvin produced the best evidence he could to exculpate "the authorities." As usual, he grew eloquent when he had to justify suppression. It would be most unwise—so ran the argument—to allow every one liberty to say what he pleased ("*la liberté à chacun de dire ce qu'il voudrait*"), for then epicureans, atheists, and despisers of God would be heartily pleased. No doctrine but the true doctrine (i.e. that of Geneva) must be proclaimed. Such a censorship did not signify a restriction of liberty. (Intolerant despots always have recourse to the same logical fallacy.) "*Ce n'est pas tyranniser l'Eglise que d'empêcher les écrivains mal intentionnés de répandre publiquement ce qui leur passe par la tête.*" Those who are gagged to check the utterance of opinions discordant with the views of a dictator, are not subjected to any coercion, if we are to believe Calvin and others of his calibre; they have been justly treated, an example being made of them "for the greater glory of God."

The weak point which Calvin had to defend did not concern the suppression of heresy, since such action had long since been copied by the Protestants from the Catholics. The real question at issue was whether the

powerful possess the right to kill persons who hold other views than their own. In the case of Servetus, Calvin asserted this right from the outset, and his business now was to justify his action. Naturally he sought justification in the Bible, endeavouring to show that he had acted in accordance with the terms of a "higher commission," in obedience to a "divine command." That higher commission, that divine command, was what had led him to thrust Servetus out of the world. Yet he could not find convincing examples in Holy Writ, because the Bible has not formulated the notion of "heresy," but refers merely to "blasphemy." Now Servetus, who amid the flames continued to call upon the name of Jesus, had never been an atheist. Calvin, always eager to quote from the Bible any passages that might serve his turn, declared nevertheless that it was a "sacred duty" imposed upon "authority," to eradicate all who held opinions subversive of authority (his own). "Just as an ordinary man would be blameworthy should he fail to draw his sword when the house of God is contaminated or when one of his adherents rebels against God, how much worse is such cowardice in a prince who shuts his eyes when wrong is done to religion." The sword is put into the hands of authorities that they may use it "for the honour of God." For actions performed in "*saint zèle*" are justified in advance. The defence of orthodoxy, of the true faith, dissolves the ties of blood, the dictates of human kindness. A man must destroy even his most immediate adherents when Satan has driven them to repudiate the "true" religion; and (we shudder as we read) "*On ne lui [Dieu] fait point l'honneur qu'on lui doit, si on ne préfère son service à tout regard humain, pour n'épargner ni parentage, ni sang, ni vie qui soit et qu'on mette en oubli toute humanité quand il est question de combattre pour sa gloire.*" With terrifying bluntness we are told that Calvin can regard as pious only those who, for the sake of doctrine



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(his doctrine), suppress "*tout regard humain*," that is to say, every sense of humaneness. Here we have a ghastly but tragical demonstration of the lengths an otherwise clear thinker and a profoundly religious man could go when blinded by fanaticism. He would willingly hand over to the Inquisition his friends, his brethren, and his kindred by blood, whenever they differed from him upon the minutest article of doctrine and held another opinion than that of the Consistory. Lest any one should repudiate so barbarous a contention, Calvin turned to his last and favourite argument, that of the Terror. He declared that any one who should defend or accuse a heretic was himself guilty of heresy and marked for punishment. Since he could not endure contradiction, Calvin proposed to intimidate those who might be moved to contradict him, threatening the offenders with the fate which had befallen Servetus. To the stake with them if they would not hold their tongues. Calvin wished to be free once for all from being worried about this vexatious question of the murder of Servetus. The incident must be closed.

But the accusing voice of the slain could not be silenced however shrilly and furiously Calvin might rage, yelling exculpations to the world. The Calvinist apologia, with its clamours to the faithful to undertake a heresy hunt, made a most unfavourable impression. The best of the Protestants were horrified at the prospect of establishing the Holy Inquisition within their own Church. Some declared that it would have been less offensive if so monstrous a thesis had been advocated by the Town Council instead of by a preacher of God's word, by one of Christ's servants. With splendid resolution, Zerchintes, town clerk of Berne, subsequently to be Castellio's loyal friend and protector, proclaimed his position: "I avow," he wrote privately to Calvin, "that I, too, am one of those who would fain limit as far as

possible the right to inflict capital punishment on account of differences in matters of faith; only excepting those whose error is deliberate and voluntary. What determines my judgment in these matters is, not those passages of Holy Writ which can be quoted against the use of force, but the example of the way in which, here in Berne, the Anabaptists have been mishandled. I myself saw a woman of eighty dragged to the scaffold, together with her daughter, a mother of six children, these two women having committed no other offence than to repudiate infant baptism. In the light of such an example, I dread lest the legal authorities might not be restrained within the limits you yourself would like to establish, and lest they might be inclined to treat petty offences as great crimes. I therefore deem it advisable that the authorities should be unduly clement and considerate instead of being over-ready to appeal to the sword. I would rather shed my own blood than be stained with the blood of a man who had done nothing to deserve punishment by death."

These are the words of a minor municipal officer in a fanatical epoch. Many shared his views while thinking it inexpedient to utter them. Even the worthy Zerchintes was as little inclined as his master, Erasmus of Rotterdam, had been to take a definite side in current disputes. Shamefacedly he informed Calvin that he did not intend to make a public protest. "I shall not step down into the arena unless my conscience forces me to do so. I would rather remain dumb, so far as my conscience allows, instead of rousing discussions and mortifying any one." Persons of a humane disposition are too ready to resign themselves to events, thus playing into the hands of the violent. Nearly all of them behaved like this excellent but pacific Zerchintes. They were steadfastly silent; the humanists, the clergy, the scholars; some from hatred of public broils; others from fear lest they them-

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selves should be suspected of heresy if they failed (hypocritically) to declare that the execution of Servetus had been a praiseworthy deed. Matters reached such a pass that it seemed as if all would comply with Calvin's preposterous demand that dissentients must be persecuted. Unexpectedly, however, a voice was raised, a voice well known to Calvin and detested by him, to accuse, in the name of affronted humanity, the man responsible for the murder of Miguel Servetus. This was the limpid voice of Castellio, who had never yet been intimidated by the threats of the Genevese dictator, and who resolutely risked his life in order to save the lives of countless others.

In spiritual warfare, not those are the best champions who light-heartedly and passionately begin the feud, but those who hesitate long, because they are lovers of peace, and because their resolutions are slowly formed. Not until they have exhausted every possibility of an understanding, and have recognized that recourse to arms is inevitable, do they joylessly accept the position thrust on them and rally to the defence; but those who have found it most difficult to decide upon militant action, are, once they have decided, the most steadfast of all. So was it with Castellio. Being a true humanist, he had no love for contention. Conciliatory methods were far more conformable to his gentle and profoundly religious nature. Like his spiritual ancestor Erasmus, he knew that truth has many facets, whether it be earthly or divine; nor was it by chance that one of his most important works (penned in 1562, but only now in the press) received the momentous title *De arte dubitandi*, "Concerning the Art of Doubting." Castellio's unceasing self-examination was far from making him a sceptic; his caution rendered him considerate towards other opinions than his own; and he would rather be silent than prematurely take a



hand in a quarrel in which he had neither lot nor part. After having, for the sake of internal freedom, voluntarily surrendered office and dignity, he withdrew from political life, preferring to devote himself to a spiritually creative deed, the translation of the Bible into Latin and French. He found a quiet home in Basle, the last enclave of religious freedom. There the university was still safeguarding the bequests of Erasmus, and for this reason the survivors of what had once been a pan-European movement fled thither, in order to escape persecution by ecclesiastical dictators. In Basle lived Karlstadt, expelled by Luther from Germany; Bernardino Ochino, whom the Roman Inquisition had hunted out of Italy; Castellio, chased by Calvin from Geneva; Laelius Socinus and Coelius Secundus Curio; and, under the mask of an assumed name, the Anabaptist David Joris, who had been outlawed in the Low Countries. A common destiny and their joint subjection to persecution brought these refugees together, although in religious matters they by no means shared one another's views. But genuine humanists never need agreement upon the minutest points of doctrine before they can enter into friendly relations. Those who had renounced the claims of the various dictators to exercise authority over their minds as well as their bodies, led a quiet and retired existence in Basle. They did not shower tracts and pamphlets upon the world; they did not deliver disputatious lectures; they did not form leagues and sects. What drew them ever more closely together was the distress with which they regarded the increasing stringency of those who exercised dictatorial powers in the realm of the spirit as well as in the realm of the flesh. Lonely "remonstrants" (as the opponents of any sort of dogmatist terror came later to be called) were united in terms of peaceful fraternity.

Of course these independent thinkers regarded the

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burning of Servetus and the ferocious pamphlet in which Calvin defended his action, as a declaration of war. Anger and horror animated them at so audacious a challenge. They recognized that the issue was decisive. If such a monstrous deed were left unchallenged, then there was an end to freedom of thought in Europe. Might would be enthroned as right. But "after so splendid a dawn," after the Reformation had raised the banner of "liberty of conscience" throughout the world, was there to be a relapse into the realm of "Cimmerian darkness"? Were all Christians who did not share Calvin's views in every respect to be extirpated with fire and sword? Was it not essential, at this critical hour, and before a thousand similar fires were kindled from the flames of Champel, to proclaim loudly that men who in spiritual matters held other views than those in power, must not be hunted like wild beasts or cruelly executed like robbers and murderers? Even though rather belatedly, the world must definitely understand that intolerance was unchristian, and, when it took the form of terrorism, inhuman. A plain word must be spoken on behalf of the persecuted and against the persecutor.

It was necessary to speak loudly and clearly—but was this still possible? There are times in which the simplest and least ambiguous truth needs to be disguised before it can be disseminated; when the humanest and most sacred thoughts must be smuggled through back doors, masked and veiled like thieves, because the front doors are watched by the catchpoles and mercenaries of the authorities. Again and again, in history, recurs the absurd spectacle that, whereas all incitations of one people or one faith against the others are tolerated and encouraged, all conciliatory tendencies, all pacifist ideals, are regarded with suspicion and are suppressed on the pretext that they are dangerous to some civil or religious

body. They are stigmatized as "defeatist," as likely to undermine pious or patriotic zeal because of their universally humanist trend. Thus, under the terror established by Calvin, Castellio and his adherents dared not promulgate their views openly. A manifesto on behalf of toleration, an appeal to our common humanity such as they planned, would be frustrated on the very first day by the embargo of the spiritual dictatorship.

Force, therefore, had to be met with cunning. A name was expressly coined. "Martinus Bellius" was announced as author of a new work; and on the title page of what was really Castellio's book, there appeared a false name as place of publication (Magdeburg instead of Basle). But, above all, in the text of this volume, an appeal for the rescue of persecuted innocents masqueraded as a scientific or a theological treatise. It was made to appear as if, in an academic way, learned ecclesiastical and other authorities were discussing the question: "*De haereticis an sint persequendi et omnino quomodo sit cum eis agendum doctorum virorum tum veterum tum recentiorum sententiae*"—or, translated: "Concerning heretics, whether they should be persecuted, and what is to be done about them, illustrated by the opinions of many learned authors both old and new." Indeed, one who should merely flutter the pages of *De haereticis*, might well believe it to be nothing more than a pious theoretical tract, for here he would find the opinions of the most noted Fathers of the Church, those of St. Augustine, St. Chrysostom, and St. Jerome, imprinted peacefully side by side with selections from the writings of such great Protestant authorities as Luther and Sebastian Franck, or those of non-partisan humanists like Erasmus. Here, surely, was nothing but a scholastic anthology, a juristic and theological assemblage of quotations from divers philosophers, compiled in order to help the reader to form an unbiased opinion concerning this difficult pro-



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blem. But a closer examination shows that no opinions are quoted other than those which declare the passing of death-sentences upon heretics to be improper. The cunning, the only malice, of this book penned in deadly earnest, lay in the fact that among the authorities who condemn the use of the last extremities of force against heretics, we find one name which must have been peculiarly galling to Calvin, namely, Calvin's own. Jehan Calvin's opinion had been promulgated in the days when he himself was persecuted, and was averse to fierce appeals to fire and sword. The slayer of Servetus, Calvin to wit, was condemned by Calvin as unchristian, in the following signed passage: "It is unchristian to use arms against those who have been expelled from the Church, and to deny them rights common to all mankind."

But what gives a book its value is that which it openly expresses, and not the meaning that is hidden away out of sight. In the dedication to the Duke of Wurtemberg, Castellio puts the dots on the i's, and the crosses on the t's. It is the opening and closing words of this dedication which lift the theological anthology above the level of a fugitive polemic. Though the dedication to the duke occupies little more than a dozen pages, they were the first pages in which it was claimed that freedom of thought had a sacred right of asylum in Europe. Although written only in favour of heretics, the dedication constitutes an animated defence of all those who, in later days, were to be persecuted by other dictators because they demanded political or philosophical independence. The struggle against the hereditary enemy of spiritual justice, against the narrowness of the fanatics who wish to suppress opinions running counter to those of their own party, was here definitively opened. That restrictive notion was victoriously confronted by the idea whose spread is the only way of liquidating hostilities on earth—the idea of toleration.

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Castellio developed his thesis with dispassionate logic, lucidly and irrefutably. The question at issue was whether heretics should be persecuted, and punished with death for what was a purely intellectual offence. But before discussing this, Castellio inquires: "What do we really mean by the term heretic?" Whom are we entitled to call a heretic, without being unjust? Castellio's answer runs: "I do not believe that all those who are termed heretics, are really heretics. . . . The appellation has to-day become so abusive, so terrifying, carries with it such an atmosphere of opprobrium, that whenever a man wishes to rid himself of a private enemy, he finds that the most convenient way is to accuse this foe of heresy. As soon as others hear the dreaded name, they are filled with such overwhelming fear that they stop their ears, and blindly assail, not only the alleged heretic, but also those who venture to say a word in his favour."

Castellio refused to become infected by such a hysteria for persecution. He knew that each era discovers a fresh group of unhappy persons upon whom to empty the vials of collective hatred. Sometimes it is on account of their religion, sometimes on account of the colour of their skin, their race, their origin, their social idea, their philosophy, that the members of some comparatively small and weak group are made targets for the annihilative energies latent in so many of us. The watchwords, the occasions, vary; but the method of calumny, contempt, destruction, remains unchanged. Now, declared the writer, an intelligent being should not allow himself to be blinded by such defamatory words, or to be carried away by the fury of mass instincts. Again and again, with a fresh devotion to balance and to justice, he must seek the right. Consequently, in this matter of heretics, "Martinus Bellius" refused to take up a definitive position until he had fully mastered the significance of the word.

What, then, is a heretic? Castellio returned again



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and again to this question. Since Calvin and the other inquisitors declared the Bible to be the only valid law-book, Bellius searched the pages of Holy Writ with the utmost care. Lo, he could not find the word or the concept in scripture. A dogmatic system, an orthodoxy, a unified doctrine, had to come into existence for the word "heretic" to gain currency; no one could rebel against a Church until that Church became an institution. True, in the Bible we find references to unbelievers and the need for their punishment. But it does not follow that one who is called a heretic is therefore an unbeliever. The case of Servetus furnished proof of this. Those who had been styled heretics, above all the Anabaptists, maintained that they were true and genuine Christians, and honoured the Saviour as their most sublime and beloved exemplar. Since no Christian ever called a Turk, a Jew, or a heathen a "heretic," heresy must be a crime committed wholly within the Christian fold. Thus we derive a new formulation. Heretics are persons who, although they are Christians, do not profess "true" Christianity, but stubbornly deviate in one way or another from the "right" path.

Have we now found our definition? Alas, how are we to decide which, among the multifarious interpretations, is "true" Christianity, or which is the "right" interpretation of the word of God? Do we find it in the Catholic, the Lutheran, the Zwinglian, the Anabaptist, the Hussite, or the Calvinist exegesis? Is there such a thing as absolute certainty in religious matters, and is it always possible to achieve a "sound" interpretation of Holy Writ? Castellio was bold enough, in defiance of the self-confident Calvin, to answer with a modest No. The meaning of Holy Writ was sometimes plain and sometimes obscure. "The truths of religion," wrote this man who was fundamentally religious, "are in their nature mysterious, and, after more than a thousand



years, are still the field of unending struggle, in which blood will not cease to flow until spiritual love illumines us and is given the last word." Any one who interprets Holy Writ can make a mistake, and therefore toleration is the first duty of the Christian. "If all things were as clear and plain as is the existence of God, Christians could easily be of one way of thinking in religious matters, just as all nations are united in the recognition that there is a God. Since, however, all is obscure and confused, Christians should cease to condemn one another. If we are wiser than the heathen, let us show ourselves better and more compassionate than were they."

Castellio has advanced a step in his disquisition. Any one who, though he recognizes the fundamentals of the Christian faith, fails to do so in the way pleasing to the established authorities, is styled a heretic. Heresy, therefore (here at length we reach the core of the matter), is not an absolute, but a relative concept. Of course for a Catholic, a Calvinist is a heretic; and equally of course for a Calvinist, an Anabaptist is a heretic. The man who in France is accounted a true believer, is a heretic in Geneva; and conversely. He who in one country will be burned as a criminal is, in a neighbouring land, acclaimed a martyr. "Whereas in one city or one neighbourhood, they will style you a true believer, in the next city, or the adjoining neighbourhood, they will despise you as a heretic; so that he who to-day wishes to live undisturbed, must have as many convictions and religions as there are towns and countries." Now Castellio comes to his last and boldest formulation. "When I reflect on what a heretic really is, I can find no other criterion than that we are all heretics in the eyes of those who do not share our view." This seems extremely simple, almost commonplace, so obvious is it. But to say as much frankly, demanded immense moral courage in those days. For the significance of this formulation was that

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a whole era, its leaders, princes and priests, Catholics and Lutherans alike, were flatly told that their heresy-hunting was absurd, and the outcome of an illusion. Thousands and tens of thousands had been persecuted and put to death, hanged, drowned, or burned, illegally; they were innocent, for they had not committed any crime against God or the State: they had not lived apart from their fellows in the realm of action, but only in the invisible world of ideas. Who is entitled to direct a fellow man's thoughts, or to consider the latter's intimate and most private convictions a crime at common law? Not the State, nor any other established authority. We read in the Bible that we are to render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and Castellio quotes Luther to the effect that the earthly kingdom has command only over the body, whereas, as far as the soul was concerned, God did not wish any mundane law to prevail. The State is entitled to insist that every subject shall comply with the dictates of external and political order. Consequently, any authoritative interference in the internal world of moral, religious, and (let me add) artistic convictions, so long as these do not involve manifest rebellion against the essence of the State (in modern terminology, so long as they do not involve political agitation) signifies an abuse of power, and an invasion of the inviolable rights of the individual. For what happens in this inner world, no one is responsible to the State, seeing that "with regard to these matters every one can make a personal appeal to God." The State authority has no concern with matters of opinion. Why, then, should people foam at the mouth when they come across some one whose philosophical convictions differ from their own; why this instant call for the police; why this murderous hatred? In default of a conciliatory spirit, true humanness is impossible. "We can only live together peacefully when we control our intolerance. Even though there will

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always be differences of opinion from time to time, we can at any rate come to general understandings, can love one another, and can enter the bonds of peace, pending the day when we shall attain unity of faith."

The blame for these butcheries, for these barbarous persecutions which dishonour the name of man, does not accrue to the "heretics." They are blameless. No one can be taken to task for his thoughts or his convictions. Guilt, in a perpetually guilty world suffering from illusions and wild confusion, attaches to fanaticism, to the impatience of idealists who will not admit that any other idea, religion, or philosophy than their own can be true. Inexorably Castellio pillories such maniacal presumption. "Men are so strongly convinced of the soundness of their own opinions, or, rather, of the illusive certainty that their own opinions are sound, that they despise the opinions of others. Cruelties and persecutions are the outcome of arrogance, so that a man will not tolerate others differing in any way from his own views, although there are to-day almost as many opinions as there are individuals. Yet there is not one sect which does not condemn all the others and wish to reign supreme. That accounts for banishments, exiles, incarcerations, burnings, hangings, the blind fury of the tormentors who are continually at work, in the endeavour to suppress certain outlooks which displease our lords and masters, or, often enough, for no explicable reason." Obstinacy on one side, leads to obstinacy on the other. As a result of spiritual intolerance, "as a result of the savage and barbaric desire to commit cruelties, we see many to-day who are so greatly inflamed by calumny that they grow enraged when one of those sentenced to execution is mercifully strangled before the faggots are fired."

Only one thing can save mankind from such barbarism—toleration. Our world has room for many truths, which, if people had goodwill, could abide



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harmoniously together. "Let us be tolerant towards one another, and let no one condemn another's belief." Heresy hunts are needless, as is any sort of persecution of opinion. Whereas Calvin, in his exculpation, had adjured princes to use fire and sword for the unsparing extirpation of heresy, Castellio implores the potentates to "incline, rather, to the side of clemency, and never yield to those who incite you to murder, for they will not stand beside you as helpers when you are called to your last account; they will have enough to do in order to defend themselves. Believe me, if Christ were here on earth to-day, He would never advise you to kill those who call on His name, even though they may err upon some detail, or may deviate from the right path."

Dispassionately, as is proper when intellectual problems call for solution, Sebastian Castellio discussed the thorny question of the guilt or innocence of so-called heretics. He carefully weighed the pros and cons; and demanded the establishment of a city of spiritual freedom to which these hunted wretches might resort for asylum. Though he felt certain of his ground, he presented his opinions humbly, whereas the sectarians, like cheapjacks in the market-place, extolled their dogmatic wares noisily. Each of these narrow-minded doctrinaires screamed from his pulpit that he and no other was hawking the true belief, that only through his voice and in his words could God's will be proclaimed, whilst Castellio said simply: "I do not speak to you claiming to be a prophet sent by God, but as a man drawn from the masses, who detests contentiousness, and whose only wish is that religion shall seek to establish itself not through quarrels, but through compassionate love, not through outward practice, but through the inward service of the heart." Doctrinaires talked to one another

as to schoolboys and slaves; but the humanists addressed one another as brother to brother, as man to man.

Nevertheless, a truly humane man could not but be strongly moved by the sight of inhuman deeds. The hand of an honest writer could not calmly go on penning statements of principle when his mind was profoundly disturbed by the illusions of his time; his voice could not but tremble when his nerves vibrated in just indignation. Thus, in the long run, Castellio could not restrain himself, or confine himself to academic inquiries concerning the martyrdom at Champel, where an innocent man was put to death amid unspeakable tortures, a scholar destroyed by a scholar, a theologian by a theologian, in the name of the religion of love.

The image of the tortured Servetus, the mass-persecutions of heretics, made Castellio raise his eyes from the written page to seek those who were inciting to such cruelties, those who were fruitlessly trying to excuse their intolerance on the ground that they were pious servants of God. Calvin is fiercely envisaged when Castellio exclaims: "However horrible these things may be, the sinners sin yet more horribly when they endeavour to wrap up their misdeeds in the raiment of Christ, and declare that they act in accordance with His will." Castellio knows that persons in authority always endeavour to justify their deeds of violence by appealing to some religious or philosophical ideal. But blood besoils any idea on whose behalf it is shed, and violence debases the thoughts it claims to defend. Miguel Servetus had not been burned at Christ's command, but at the command of Jehan Calvin, and this was a disgrace to the whole of Christendom. "Who," exclaims Castellio, "would to-day wish to become a Christian when those who confess themselves Christians are slain by other Christians without mercy by fire and water and the sword, and treated more cruelly than murderers or

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robbers? Who would wish to go on serving Christ when he sees how to-day any one that differs in some paltry detail from persons who have wrested power to themselves, is burned alive in the name of Christ, although, like Servetus, he calls on Christ amid the flames, and loudly declares himself a believer in Christ? What more could Satan do than burn those who call on the name of Jesus?"

This admirably humane man therefore feels it is time to dispel the illusion that persons are martyred and murdered merely because, on the intellectual plane, they differ from the potentates of the hour. And since he sees that potentates always misuse their powers, and since he himself, alone, a weakling, is the only person on earth to espouse the cause of the persecuted and the hunted, he despairingly raises his voice and ends his appeal in an ecstatic fugue of compassion.

"O Creator and king of the world, dost thou see these things? Art thou become so changed, so cruel and so contrary to thine own self? When thou wast on earth none was more mild, more clement, more patient of injury. When scourged, spat upon, mocked, crowned with thorns and crucified between two thieves, in the midst of thy humiliation thou didst pray for those who had done these shameful things to thee. Art thou now so changed? I implore thee in the sacred name of thy Father: can it really be thy will that those who do not understand thy precepts as the mighty shall be drowned, cut with lashes to the entrails, sprinkled with salt, dismembered by the sword, roasted at a slow fire, and tortured to death as cruelly as possible? Dost thou command and approve these things, O Christ? Is it really thy servants who have organized such butcheries, who thus flay thy people and chop them to mincemeat? Art thou really present when people call thy name in witness during such atrocities, as if thou wert an hungered for



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human flesh? If thou, Christ, do really command these things, what is left over for Satan to do? What a terrible blasphemy it is to declare that thou couldst command these deeds of Satan! What base presumption on the part of men to ascribe to Christ that which can only come to pass through the will and inventiveness of the Devil."

Had Sebastian Castellio written nothing more than the preface to the book *De haereticis*, and in that preface, nothing but this page, his name would remain imperishable in the history of mankind. For how solitary was his voice; how little hope could he have that his adjuration would find hearers in a world where the clash of arms dulled the sound of words and where war was the last appeal. Still, though they have been promulgated again and again by religious teachers and by sages, the most humane demands of forgetful mankind must be restored to memory. "Doubtless I say nothing," adds the modest Castellio, "which others have not said before me. But it is never superfluous to repeat what is true and just until it enforces recognition." Since, in every age, violence renews itself in changed forms, the struggle against it must continually be renewed by those who cling to the things of the spirit. They must never take refuge behind the pretext that at the moment force is too strong for them. For what it is necessary to say cannot be said too often, and truth can never be uttered in vain. Even when the Word is not victorious, it manifests its eternal presence; and one who serves it at such an hour has given glorious proof that no Terror holds sway over a free spirit, but that even in the most cruel of centuries there is still a place for the voice of humaneness.

## Chapter 7

### CONSCIENCE AGAINST VIOLENCE

PERSONS who are ruthless in the attempt to suppress the opinions of others, are extremely sensitive to contradiction. Thus Calvin regarded it as monstrously unjust when the world at large ventured to discuss Servetus's execution, instead of enthusiastically accepting it without other comment than that it was a pious action most pleasing in the sight of Almighty God. With perfect seriousness the man who had just roasted a fellow man to death on account of a difference of opinion, demanded sympathy, not for the victim, but for himself. "If you could know," he wrote to a friend, "of as much as a tenth of the invectives and onslaughts to which I have been subjected, you would feel compassion for me in my tragical position. On all sides, the curs are yapping at me; every conceivable term of abuse has been showered on me. Even more fiercely than by my papistical adversaries, am I attacked by those of my own camp who are inspired with envy and hatred." Great was Calvin's exasperation when he found that, notwithstanding the texts he quoted from the Bible and the arguments he vociferated, he was not to get away unchallenged after the murder of Servetus. The neurotic irritability roused in him by an uneasy conscience, became intensified to panic as soon as he learned that Castellio and others in Basle were preparing a polemic against him.

The first thought of any one of dictatorial temperament, is to suppress or to gag opinions differing from his own. On hearing from Basle, Calvin seated himself at

his writing-desk, and, without having read the book *De haereticis*, he exhorted the Swiss synods to prohibit its circulation. Above all, there must be no more discussion. Geneva had spoken, "*Geneva locuta est*"; whatever other persons might wish to contribute to the story of Servetus must, on general principle, be stigmatized as error, nonsense, falsehood, heresy, or blasphemy—because it would express opposition to Calvin. His pen worked busily. On March 28, 1554, he wrote to Bullinger that a book had been published in Basle, with a false name on the title-page, in which Castellio and Curio endeavoured to prove that heretics ought not be cleared out of the way by force. It would never do to allow such a doctrine to be diffused, since it was "poisonous to demand considerateness, this implying that heresies and blasphemies are not to be regarded as unpunishable offences." Quick, quick, a gag for these advocates of toleration! "May it please God that the pastors of our Church, even though somewhat late in the day, shall see to it that this mischief shall not spread." One appeal did not suffice him. Next day, his second self, Théodore de Bèze, wrote even more urgently: "You will find on the title-page the name of Magdeburg as the place of publication, but to my way of thinking this Magdeburg must be on the banks of the Rhine, in the place where many other such infamies have had their birth. I cannot but ask myself what is still left intact of the Christian religion if people are going to 'tolerate' what this miscreant has spued out in his preface."

Such protests, however, came a day after the fair. The polemic appeared before the denunciation. When the first copy reached Geneva, there was a volcanic eruption of fury. What? Were there actually persons who wished to give humanity precedence over discipline? Those who held unrighteous views were to be handled gently, in a brotherly spirit, instead of being hurried to



the stake? Was every Christian to be allowed to interpret Holy Writ according to his will and pleasure, instead of that privilege being reserved for the Genevese Consistory? This would be a deadly peril to the Church—by which Calvin naturally meant his own Church. As if at the word of command, shouts of “Heresy!” were raised in Geneva. “A new heresy has been discovered!”—thus people cried to all the winds of heaven; a peculiarly dangerous heresy, “Bellianism.” The name was henceforward and for a considerable time given to the doctrine of toleration in matters of belief, the word being coined from the name of the reputed author of the book *Martinus Bellius*, alias *Castellio*. “We must stamp out this burst of hell-fire before it spreads over the surface of the earth.” Frenzied with wrath, de Bèze wrote about the first public demand for toleration: “Since the earliest days of Christendom, no such infamies have been heard in the land.”

A council of war was summoned in Geneva. Should the polemic be answered or not? Zwingli’s successor, Bullinger, whom the Genevese had so urgently implored to have the book promptly suppressed, wrote shrewdly from Zurich to the effect that it would soon be forgotten unless it were advertised by suppression. Better take no steps against it. But Farel and Calvin, impatient as ever, insisted upon a public rejoinder. Since Calvin had not come off very well in a recent attempt, he preferred to remain discreetly in the background, and confided the theological spurs to one of his younger disciples, Théodore de Bèze, who was to earn the dictator’s thanks by an overwhelmingly vigorous onslaught upon the “devilish” doctrine of toleration.

Théodore de Bèze, in general a pious and just man, who, as a reward for many years of faithful service to

Calvin was in due time to succeed his chief, outdid even Calvin (as a servile spirit will often outdo a creative one) in his furious hatred of any breath of spiritual freedom. From him derives the terrible utterance which, in the history of thought, has given his name a sinister glory, "*Libertas conscientiae diabolicum dogma*"—freedom of conscience is a devilish doctrine. Away with freedom. Much better to destroy with fire and sword those who commit the abomination of independent thought; "better to have a tyrant, however cruel," exclaims de Bèze, "than permit every one to do what he pleases. . . . The contention that heretics should not be punished is as monstrous as the contention that parricides and matricides should not be put to death; for heretics are a thousandfold worse criminals than these." From the foregoing sample, the reader can judge to what insensate folly this pamphlet descended in its crusade against "Bellianism." What? "*Monstres déguisés en hommes*" were to be treated with humaneness, in accordance with their own demand? No; discipline must come first, and humaneness afterwards. Never should a leader yield to the promptings of mercy when doctrine was at stake; for this would be "*charité diabolique et non chrétienne*." Here, and not for the last time, we encounter the militant theory that humaneness—"crudelis humanitas" are de Bèze's words—is a crime against mankind, since mankind can be led towards an ideological goal only by iron discipline and inexorable strictness. "We must not tolerate a few ravening wolves, unless we are prepared to deliver over to their fangs the whole flock of good Christians. . . . Shame upon this reputed clemency, which is in reality the utmost cruelty." Thus de Bèze, in his zealous determination to exterminate the Bellianists; and he goes on to implore the authorities "*de frapper vertueusement de ce glaive*."

Castellio, in the abundance of his compassion, had

raised his voice to a merciful God, praying that an end should at length be put to this bestial slaughter. Now the Genevese pastor, inspired with hatred no less earnest than had been Castellio's compassion, beseeches this same God to permit the massacre to continue without pause, "and that the Christian princes shall be vouchsafed enough magnanimity and firmness to extirpate the whole rout of evildoers." But even such an extirpation is not enough for the vengefulness of a de Bèze. Heretics should not merely be put to death, but their execution must be made as slow and painful as can be. Beforehand, he excuses every conceivable torture by the pious exclamation: "If they were to be punished in accordance with the measure of their offences, I think it would be difficult to find any form of martyrdom which could adequately chastise them for their heinous transgression." One sickens as one reads such pæans in defence of holy terror, such cruel arguments on behalf of brutality. Still, we have to bear them in mind, if we are to grasp the peril to which the Protestant world would have been exposed had it allowed itself to be driven by the hatred and fanaticism of the Genevese into the foundation of a new Inquisition—and also if we are to grasp how bold was the venture of the thoughtful souls who, in defiance of these maniacs, staked their lives on behalf of toleration. For de Bèze, in his libellus, demanded that, in order to blunt the edge of this dreadful idea of toleration, every friend of the doctrine, every advocate of "Bellianism," must henceforward be treated as "an enemy of the Christian religion"—must be regarded as a heretic, and, consequently, burned alive. "We should, in their own persons, teach them every point of the thesis I advocate, namely that atheists and heretics must be punished by the civil authorities." To ensure that Castellio and his friends should have no doubt as to what awaited them if, prompted by their own consciences, they went on defend-



ing such wretches as Servetus, de Bèze assured them that the false name of the place of publication and the pseudonymous authorship would not save them from persecution. "Every one knows who you are and what are your plans. . . . I warn you while there is yet time, Bellius and Montfort and your whole clique."

Only to outward seeming, then, was de Bèze's tract a contribution to an academic dispute. The threat above quoted gives it its true significance. The defenders of spiritual freedom were to realize at last that they were putting their lives in peril every time they demanded humane treatment. In his impatient desire to make Sebastian Castellio, leader of the "Bellianists," incautious, de Bèze accused him of cowardice. The Genevese pastor wrote scornfully: "He, who in other respects is so bold, shows in this book, which speaks so much of compassion and clemency, that he is a coward, inasmuch as he only ventures to thrust out his head when his face is covered by a mask." Perhaps the writer hoped that Castellio would take warning, and cautiously retire into the background; or perhaps he really wanted Castellio to disclose himself. Anyhow, Castellio was quick to raise the gauntlet. The very fact that Genevese orthodoxy now showed itself disposed to make a dogma and a regular practice of its repulsive behaviour, forced Castellio, though a passionate lover of peace, to declare open war. He saw that the decisive hour had struck. Unless the crime committed upon Miguel Servetus was, though posthumously, brought before the court of appeal constituted by the whole of Christendom, brands from this first burning would be used to fire hundreds, nay, thousands, of similar ones. What had been no more than an isolated act of murder, would petrify into a principle. Intermitting, for the moment, his learned labours,

Castellio devoted himself to writing the most important indictment of the century, the accusation of Jehan Calvin for a murder in the name of religion, committed on Miguel Servetus at Champel. This public accusation, *Contra libellum Calvini*, although primarily directed against an individual, proved, through its moral energy, one of the most splendid polemics ever penned against attempts to overpower the word by the law, opinion by dogma, and eternally free conscience by eternally contemptible force.

For years and years Castellio had been acquainted with his adversary, and had grown familiar with his methods. He knew that Calvin would transmogrify every attack upon his person into an attack against doctrine, true religion, and even into an attack on God. Castellio, therefore, made it clear from the outset that in *Contra libellum Calvini*, he was neither accepting nor condemning the theses of Miguel Servetus, and was not proposing to pass any sort of judgment upon religious or exegetic problems, but was only bringing against the man, Jehan Calvin, a charge of murder. Being determined that no sophistical distortion should divert him from his purpose, in the lapidary style of an accomplished lawyer, he expounded the cause he was advocating. "Jehan Calvin enjoys great authority to-day, and I could wish that he enjoyed even more did I know him to be of a gentler disposition. But his last important public action was a bloody execution followed by threats levelled at a number of pious persons. That is why I, who detest the shedding of blood (should not all the world do this?), have undertaken, with God's help, to disclose Calvin's purposes to the world, or at least to bring back into the right path some of those whom he has led astray.

"On October 27, 1553, the Spaniard, Miguel Servetus,

was burned in Geneva on account of his religious convictions, the instigator of the burning being Calvin, pastor of the cathedral in that city. This execution has roused many protests, especially in Italy and France. In answer to these protests, Calvin has just issued a book, which seems to be most adroitly tinted. The author's aim is to justify himself, to attack Servetus, and to prove that Servetus was rightly punished by death. I propose to subject this book to a critical examination. In accordance with his usual controversial manner, Calvin will probably describe me as one of Servetus's disciples, but I hope that no one will thereby be misled. I am not defending the theses of Servetus, but am attacking the false theses of Calvin. I leave absolutely unconsidered discussions about baptism, the Trinity, and such matters. I do not even possess a copy of Servetus's book, since Calvin has burned all the copies he could lay hands on and I therefore do not know what ideas Servetus put forward. I shall do no more than pillory the errors of Calvin as to points which have no bearing upon differences of principle; and I hope to make clear to every one what sort of man this is whom the lust for blood has driven crazy. I shall not deal with him as he dealt with Servetus, whom he committed to the flames, together with the books whose writing was deemed a crime—Servetus whom, even now when he is dead, Calvin continues to revile. Calvin, having burned the man and his books, has the audacity to refer us to these books, quoting detached passages. It is as if an incendiary, having reduced a house to ashes, were then to invite us to inspect the furniture in the various rooms. For my own part I should never burn either an author or his books. The book I am attacking is open to every one, obtainable by every one, in either of two editions, one Latin and the other French. To avoid the possibility of objection, I shall, in the case of every citation, put the number of the paragraph from which it



is taken, while my answer to each passage will bear the same number as the original."

A discussion cannot be opened more frankly. In the aforesaid book, Calvin had unambiguously expounded his views; and Castellio uses this "exhibit" accessible to all, as an examining magistrate uses the depositions of an accused person. Word for word, Castellio reprints Calvin's book, so that no one shall be able to say the critic has falsified or modified his adversary's opinions; or that the critic has laid himself open to suspicion by having abbreviated Calvin's text. Thus this second trial of Servetus's case is much more just than had been the first trial in Geneva, when the accused had been kept in a dark and damp cell, denied witnesses, and not allowed the services of defending counsel. Castellio was determined that the Servetus case should be discussed freely in its every detail by the whole humanist world; that its moral issues should be plainly brought to light.

There could be no dispute about certain essential facts. A man who, while the flames were devouring him, loudly proclaiming his innocence, had been cruelly executed at the instigation of Calvin and with the consent of the Genevese Town Council. Castellio goes on to ask the question: "What really was Miguel Servetus's offence? How could Jehan Calvin, who held no political office but only an ecclesiastical one, submit this purely theological affair to the municipal authorities? Had the municipal authorities of Geneva any right to sentence Servetus on account of the alleged crime? Finally, upon what authority, and in accordance with what law or statute, was this foreign theologian put to death in Geneva?"

As regards the first question, Castellio examines the

minutes and Calvin's own utterances, in order to ascertain with what crime Miguel Servetus was charged. The only accusation Castellio can find is that Servetus "has impudently distorted the evangel, being driven thereto by an inexplicable longing for novelties." Thus the sole charge Calvin brings against Servetus is that the Spaniard interpreted the Bible independently and arbitrarily, leading him (Servetus) to other conclusions than those of which Calvin's ecclesiastical doctrine was the expression. Thereupon Castellio hits back. Did Servetus stand alone among the champions of the Reformation as regards such independent and arbitrary interpretations of the gospels? Who will venture to declare that if he did promulgate arbitrary interpretations, he was thereby departing from the true significance of the Reformation? Was not such individual interpretation one of the fundamental demands of the Reformation? What else did the leaders of the Evangelical Church busy themselves about than to establish a right to re-interpret Holy Writ? Had not Calvin himself, and Calvin's friend Farel, been the boldest and most resolute of all those who had endeavoured, in this way, to reconstruct the Church? "It is not merely that Calvin himself showed an extravagant zeal for innovations, but that he has done so much to impress them on others as to make contradiction dangerous. In the course of ten years he has made more innovations than the Catholic Church made in six centuries." Calvin, having himself been one of the boldest of the reformers, is not entitled to stigmatize as crime the making of new interpretations within the bounds of the Protestant Church.

"Calvin, however, taking for granted his own infallibility, regards his views as right and the views of any one who may differ from him as wrong." This brings Castellio to the second question: Who appointed Calvin judge concerning what is true and what is untrue? "Of

course Calvin tells us that every writer who does not say ay to his ay, and no to his no, is an evilly disposed person. He therefore demands that those who differ from him shall be prevented, not only from writing, but also from speaking; the implication being that he alone is entitled to expound what he regards as right." Now Castellio wishes to insist, once for all, that no man and no party is justified in saying: "We alone know the truth, and every opinion other than ours is erroneous." All truths, and especially religious truths, are contestable and ambiguous. "It is presumptuous to decide with so much positiveness concerning mysteries which are understood by God alone, and to behave as if we were party to His most hidden designs. And it is no less arrogant to fancy we can attain certainty about such matters and can represent them clearly to our imagination, when in reality we know nothing at all about them."

Since the world began, multifarious disasters have been the work of doctrinaires who intolerantly maintained their own views and opinions to be the only sound ones. It is these fanatics for the unification of thoughts and actions in accordance with their own model who, by self-glorification and contentiousness, trouble the peace of the world, transforming the natural juxtaposition of ideas into opposition and murderous disputes. Castellio accused Calvin of such spiritual intolerance: "All the sects have founded their religions upon the word of God, and the members of each sect regard their own as being in exclusive possession of the truth. But, according to Calvin, one sect alone is right, and the others must accommodate themselves to it. Of course to Maître Jehan Calvin his own doctrine seems true. But the leaders of other sects hold the same belief about their opinions. Calvin says that the others are wrong; but these others say that Calvin is wrong. Calvin wants to be supreme judge; so do the others. Who is to decide? At



any rate, who appointed Calvin supreme arbiter with an exclusive right to inflict capital punishment? Upon what warrant does he base his monopolist position? On this, that he derives his justification from the word of God. But the others make the same claim. Or, perhaps, he assures us that his doctrine is incontestable. Incontestable in whose eyes? In his own, in Jehan Calvin's eyes. Why, then, does he write so many books, if the truth which he proclaims is obvious? Why has he never troubled to write a book in order to prove that murder or adultery is a crime? Because that is clear to every one. If Calvin has in fact unveiled the whole field of spiritual truth, why does not he allow others a little time in which to grasp the facts that are so clear to him? Why does he strike them to earth before they have had a chance, thus depriving them of the possibility to recognize truth as he sees it?"

Castellio hereby makes one decisive point. Calvin has arrogated to himself a position to which he is not entitled, the position of supreme arbiter in spiritual and religious matters. It behoved him, if he regarded Servetus's opinions as erroneous, to inform Servetus where he had gone astray. But instead of arguing reasonably and kindly, Calvin, without further ado, resorted to force. "You began by arresting your opponent, by locking Servetus up in prison, and you excluded from the trial all except those who were the Spaniard's enemies." Calvin had had recourse to the doctrinaire's usual practice. Whenever a doctrinaire finds that the argument is going against him, he closes his ears to his adversary's words and gags his adversary's mouth. Such a resort to censorship betrays a sense of insecurity in a person or in a doctrine. As if foreseeing his own fate, Castellio went on to speak of Calvin's moral responsibility. "Let me ask you a question, Monsieur Calvin. If you had gone to law with any one concerning a heritage, and your

adversary was able to procure from the judge a ruling that he (the adversary) alone was entitled to speak, whilst you yourself were forbidden to utter a word, would you not instantly have protested against this injustice? Why do you do to others what you would not wish them to do unto you? We are engaged in a dispute about faith. Why, then, do you wish to close our mouths? Are you so firmly convinced of the weakness of your case? Are you so much afraid that the decision will go against you, and that you will forfeit your position as dictator?"

For a moment Castellio interrupts his plea in order to call a witness. A famous theologian will testify, as against the preacher Jehan Calvin, that the laws of God prohibit the use of force by the civil authorities to control exclusively spiritual offences. The great scholar, the famous theologian, who is now summoned to testify is Calvin himself, who, in this matter, enters the witness-box most unwillingly. "Inasmuch as Calvin finds that confusion prevails, he hastens to accuse others, lest he himself shall be suspected. Yet it is plain that one thing only has brought about the aforesaid confusion, namely, his attitude as a persecutor. The judgment which, at his instigation, was passed on Servetus, aroused consternation and anger, not only in Geneva, but throughout the western world. Now he is trying to shift on to others' shoulders the blame for what he himself has done. But he sang another song when he himself was one of those who suffered persecution. At that time he wrote many pages inveighing against such persecutions. Lest any of my readers should doubt me, I will transcribe a passage from Calvin's *Institutio*."

The Calvin of 1554 would probably have sent to the stake the Calvin who wrote the words which Castellio goes on to quote. For in the *Institutio* he had written:

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"It is criminal to put heretics to death. To make an end of them by fire and sword is opposed to every principle of humanity." As soon as he gained supreme power Calvin had hastened to erase that appeal to humanity from his book. For in the second edition of the *Institutio*, the words just quoted have been sedulously modified. Just as Napoleon, when he became First Consul, was careful to buy up and destroy all obtainable copies of the Jacobin pamphlet of his youth, so the leader of the Genevese Church, having become a persecutor instead of remaining one of the persecuted, was eager to suppress all knowledge of his erstwhile appeal for moderation. But Castellio will not allow Calvin to run away from his own words. He reproduces them textually in his polemic. "Now," Castellio goes on, having finished the quotation, "let all my readers compare Calvin's original declaration with his writings and his deeds to-day, and it will become plain that his present and his past are as unlike one another as light and darkness. Because he has had Servetus put to death, he now wishes to execute in like manner all who differ from himself. He, the lawmaker, repudiates his own law, and demands the death penalty for dissentients. . . . Can we be surprised that Calvin wants to bring others down to death when he is afraid that they will disclose his instability and his mutations, thrusting these into the lime-light? Those who act wrongly dread the clear light of day."

But clear light is what Castellio wants. He insists that it is incumbent upon Calvin to explain to the world why a sometime advocate of freedom of thought should have had Servetus burned alive at Champel. Inexorably, therefore, the trial is resumed. . . .

Two questions have been settled. Dispassionate study



of the facts has shown that Miguel Servetus's offence, if any, was committed on a purely spiritual plane; and, further, that the Spaniard's deviation from what Calvin regarded as a valid interpretation ought never to have been treated as ordinary crime. Why, then, asks Castellio, did Calvin appeal, in a purely theoretical and abstract affair, to the secular powers in order to suppress an opinion that differed from his own? Between thinkers, differences must be settled by the instruments of thought alone. "If Servetus had taken up arms against you, you would have been entitled to call the Town Council to your aid. But since his only weapon against you was the pen, why did you attack his writings with fire and sword? Tell me, why did you get yourself backed up by the civil authorities?"

A State has no jurisdiction in matters of conscience. The Town Council has nothing to do with the defence of theological doctrines which are exclusively the concern of scholars. The business of the Town Council is to protect a scholar just as it protects a craftsman, a journeyman, a physician, or any other citizen to whom wrong has been done. Only if Servetus had tried to murder Calvin should the Town Council have been called upon to intervene in Calvin's defence. But since Servetus used nothing but rational arguments to further his attack on Calvin, Calvin should have defended himself by arguments and rational considerations. Castellio incontrovertibly refutes Calvin's attempt to justify what he had done by appeal to a higher, a divine command; for Castellio holds it impossible that there can be a divine or Christian command to murder. Calvin appealed to the Mosaic law, which, he declared, commanded the use of fire and sword to extirpate unbelief. Castellio rejoins fiercely: "How, in God's name, will Calvin put into execution this law to which he appeals? It seems to me that in all towns he will have to destroy habitations,

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cattle, and furniture. If he should ever have enough military force at his disposal, he must attack France and all the other nations which harbour what he regards as heretical doctrines, must raze their cities to the ground, kill men, women, children, and even babes in the womb." Calvin, in his apologia, declared that the whole body of Christian doctrine would perish unless those whose mission it was to safeguard it, had courage enough to amputate a gangrenous limb. To which Castellio replied: "The severance of unbelievers from the Church is the concern of priests, who are entitled to excommunicate heretics and to expel them from the congregation, but not to put them to death." Nowhere in the gospels, nor yet in any moral treatise ever given to the world, was such intolerance demanded. "Will you dare, in the last resort, to say that Jesus Himself taught you to burn your fellow men?" Thus does Castellio thunder at Calvin who, "his hands dripping with the blood of Servetus," had penned so preposterous an apologia. Since Calvin continued to declare he was forced to burn Servetus in defence of doctrine, forced to protect the word of God; since, again and again, like all who appeal to violence, he attempted to justify the use of violence with reference to some supra-personal interest—there now came, like a flash in the dark night of a most gloomy century, Castellio's imperishable words: "To burn a man alive does not defend a doctrine, but slays a man. When the Genevese executed Servetus, they were not defending a doctrine, but sacrificing a man. We do not testify our own faith by burning another, but only by our readiness to be burned on behalf of our faith."

"To burn a man alive does not defend a doctrine, but slays a man." How true and clear, how imperish-

able and humane is this aphorism. In a pithy phrase, Castellio passed judgment, once for all, upon the murderer of Servetus. Whatever logical, ethical, national, or religious pretext may be advanced to justify the execution of a human being, nothing can abrogate the personal responsibility of the executioner or instigator. There is always some particular person responsible for a deed of blood, and murder can never be condoned by abstract philosophical precepts. Truth can be diffused, but cannot be enforced. No doctrine becomes sounder, no truth becomes truer, because of zealotry; nor can propaganda by deed exalt a doctrine or a truth. Still less does a doctrine or a philosophy become truer through the extirpation of individuals whose conscience compels them to deny that truth. Opinions and conceptions are individual experiences and events, subject to none except to the individual who holds them. They cannot be drilled or regulated. A truth may invoke the name of God a thousand times, may again and again proclaim itself sacrosanct, but that does not warrant it in destroying a God-given human life, which has a sanctity superior to that of any doctrine. Although to Calvin, dogmatic and partisan, it seems of no moment that perishable human beings should perish for the sake of imperishable ideas, Castellio holds that every man who suffers or is slain for the sake of his convictions is an innocent victim. Coercion in spiritual matters is not only a crime against the spirit, but also labour lost. "We must constrain no one, for coercion has never made any one better. Those who try to coerce persons into accepting a faith behave as foolishly as one who, with a stick, should thrust food into a sick man's mouth." An end, therefore, to the suppression of those who hold dissentient opinions. "Let your officers at length be deprived of authority to use force or to persecute. Give to every man the right to use the tongue and the pen freely (for this is what St. Paul meant when



he said: 'Ye may all prophesy . . . covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues'), and soon you will learn what wonders liberty will achieve when freed from coercion!"

The facts have been examined, the questions answered. Now Sebastian Castellio sums up and passes judgment in the name of outraged humanity. History has endorsed this judgment. A man named Miguel Servetus, searcher after God, "*un étudiant de la Sainte Escriptrue*," has been slain. Calvin is indicted, having been the instigator of the trial, and the Town Council of Geneva is charged with the actual commission of the crime. A spiritual rehearing of a case has shown that both the aforesaid authorities, the ecclesiastical and the secular, exceeded their jurisdiction. The Town Council "has no warrant for passing judgment upon a spiritual offence." Still more guilty is Calvin, who thrust this responsibility upon the municipal authorities. "Influenced by your testimony and by that of your accomplices, the Town Council put a man to death. But the Town Council was as incompetent to act or to distinguish in such a matter as a blind man is to distinguish colours." Calvin is guilty twice over, guilty both of instigating and of executing the abominable deed. No matter what were the motives which led him to thrust the unhappy Servetus into the flames, his action was monstrous. "You had Servetus executed, either because he thought what he said, or because, in accordance with his inward conviction, he said what he thought. If you slew him because he gave expression to his inward conviction, you killed him for speaking the truth, for even if what a man utters be erroneous, yet it is true if he only utters what he believes to be true. If, on the other hand, you had him put to death simply because his views were erroneous, then it

was your duty to try, before taking such extreme measures, to win him over to what you regard as right views; or, quoting scripture to the purpose, to prove that you have no option but to order the execution of all who err, though they err in good faith." Calvin had, without justification, slain a dissident, and was guilty, thrice guilty, of premeditated murder.

Guilty, guilty, guilty. As if with three blasts of a trumpet, Castellio's judgment is proclaimed to the world. Humaneness, the supreme moral authority, has decided. But what avails it, to save the honour of a dead man whom no posthumous atonement can recall to life? No, the essential thing now is to protect the living, by stigmatizing an act of inhumanity, so that countless similar acts may be averted. It is not the man Jehan Calvin alone who stands condemned. Calvin's book, with its ghastly doctrine of terror and suppression, must be declared inhuman. "Do you not see," Castellio asks the man on whom he has passed sentence, "whither your book and your actions are leading? Many maintain themselves to be defending God's honour. Henceforward 'God's defenders' who wish to slaughter human beings, will appeal to your testimony. Following the same disastrous path as you, they will, like yourself, imbrue their hands with gore. Like you, they will send to the scaffold those who hold other opinions than their own." It is not isolated fanatics who are so dangerous, but the evil spirit of fanaticism; not only autocratic, dogmatic, over-positive, and bloodthirsty persons need to be resisted by persons of free spirit, but any idea which calls Terror to its aid. Writing just before the opening of religious wars that were to last a hundred years, Castellio grows prophetic. "Even the most cruel of tyrants will not, with their cannon, shed so much blood as you have shed or will shed through your bloodthirsty conjurations—unless God take pity upon poor humanity, and open the eyes of

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princes and other rulers until they desist from their sanguinary work."

Even as Sebastian Castellio, gentle apostle of toleration, found it impossible to remain indifferent in view of the sufferings of the persecuted and the hunted, but was moved to raise his voice to God in a despairing prayer for more humaneness on earth—so, in the polemic I have been quoting, his voice thunders forth a curse upon all persons whose fanatical hatred makes them disturbers of the peace; and his book closes with a magnificent invocation: "This infamy of religious persecutions was already raging in the days of Daniel. Since the prophet's enemies could find nothing assailable in his behaviour, they put their heads together in order to attack him through his convictions. The same thing is happening to-day. When people cannot discover anything to complain of in their enemy's conduct, they take up the cudgels against his 'doctrine'; and this is extremely adroit, seeing that the authorities, who have no opinion of their own, are all the easier to persuade. Thus the weak are oppressed by those who loudly appeal to the 'sanctity of doctrine.' Alas, their 'sacred doctrine' is one which Jesus will repudiate with loathing on the Day of Judgment, when He will hold assize upon conduct, not upon doctrine. When they say unto Him, 'Lord, we were on Thy side, and acted in accordance with Thy teaching,' He will answer: 'Away with you, ye malefactors!'"



## Chapter 8

### VIOLENCE DISPOSES OF CONSCIENCE

SELDOM has a spiritual despot been attacked more vigorously and perhaps never with so fulminant a passion than was Calvin in Castellio's *Contra libellum Calvini*. Its essential truth and its clarity would, one might have imagined, teach even the most indifferent that freedom of thought under Protestantism and therefore the general freedom of European thinkers would be lost if they did not instantly rebel against Genevese dragooning. According to all earthly probability, it was to be expected that, after Castellio's flawless demonstration of the bearings of the trial and burning of Servetus, right-thinking persons throughout the western world would have endorsed the judgment. An adversary, in such a cause, overthrown by so formidable an onslaught, must surely have been defeated for all time, and Castellio's manifesto could hardly fail to make an end of Calvin's uncompromising orthodoxy.

Yet nothing happened! This dazzling polemic, this splendid appeal for toleration, did not seem to produce the smallest effect; for the simplest and cruellest of reasons—because Castellio's *Contra libellum Calvini* was not, at that date, allowed to go to press. On Calvin's instigation, the book was throttled by the censorship before it could voice its appeal to the conscience of Europe.

At the last moment, when transcripts were already being passed from hand to hand by the writer's intimates in

Basle, the Genevese potentates, being well served by their spies, had learned how dangerous a challenge to their authority was about to be issued by Castellio. They struck instantly, and struck hard. Terrible, under such conditions, is the preponderance of a State organization as against an isolated individual. Calvin, who had committed the atrocity of burning Servetus alive because Servetus differed from him upon doctrinal points, was able, thanks to the one-way working of the censorship, to defend his atrocious deed unmolested; whereas Castellio, who wanted to protest in the name of humanity, was refused a hearing. True, the town of Basle had no reason for forbidding a free burgher, who was also a professor at the university, to engage in a literary polemic; but Calvin, a master tactician, pulled his wires skilfully. He worked through diplomatic channels. An official protest was made, not by Calvin as private citizen, but by the town of Geneva, against Castellio's proposed attack on "doctrine." Consequently the Town Council and the University of Basle were confronted with a painful choice; either they must abandon the cause of a free author, or else must maintain that cause in opposition to one of the mightiest of the federal States. As almost always happens, might prevailed over right, power over morality. It would be better, thought the prudent town councillors of Basle, to sacrifice an individual than to run their heads against a wall, so they issued a prohibition against the publication of any writings which were not strictly orthodox. This edict made it impossible for Castellio to publish his *Contra libellum Calvini*; and enabled Calvin to exclaim gleefully: "*Il va bien que les chiens qui aboient derrière nous ne nous peuvent mordre.*"

Even as Servetus had been silenced by blazing faggots, so now was Castellio silenced by the censorship; and once again "authority" was maintained by terror. Castellio's

sword-arm had been smitten off; the writer could no longer write. Nay, worse than this, he had been deprived of the power of defending himself, when his triumphant adversary hit back with redoubled wrath against the man who had not been permitted to deliver his blow. Almost a century was to elapse before *Contra libellum Calvinii* could be printed. What Castellio wrote in this pamphlet had a prophetic ring: "Why do you do to others that which you would not endure if done to yourself? We are concerned with a dispute about religious matters; why, then, do you gag your adversaries?"

Against a reign of terror there is no appeal. In gloomy resignation, Castellio had perforce to submit. None the less, there is some consolation for the oppressed during epochs in which force prevails over mind, and that is the sovereign contempt the vanquished can show for the victor. "Your words and your weapons are only those common to every despotism; and they can but give you a temporal, not a spiritual dominance; a dominance based upon coercion, and not upon the love of God. Nor do I envy you your power and your weapons. I have other powers and other weapons—an imperturbable conviction of innocence, and trust in Him who will help me and give me grace. Even if, for a season, truth is suppressed by the blind 'justice' of this world, no one can permanently coerce truth. Let us cease to heed the judgment of a world which slew Christ: let us ignore an assize before which only the cause of violence proves victorious. The kingdom of God is not of this world."

Once more terror had gained the upper hand. Worse still, Calvin's temporal power was actually intensified by his crimes. It is fruitless, in the annals of history, to seek for the poetic justice of the story books. We have to accommodate ourselves to the fact that history, being a



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reflexion of the Pantheos, is neither moral nor immoral in its doings. It neither punishes evil nor rewards good. Since it is based, not upon right, but on might, it usually assigns victory to men of might; unrestrained boldness and brutal decisions do, as a rule, in temporal matters, bring advantage rather than disadvantage to the doers or misdoers.

Calvin, having been attacked for his unfeeling severity, realized that only one thing could save him—yet more severity and a yet more relentless use of force. Again and again in history, we can trace the working of the law that one who has appealed to force must use force to the bitter end, and one who has established a reign of terror must intensify terror to frightfulness. The opposition to Calvin during and after the trial of Servetus only confirmed him in his opinion that for an authoritarian ruler the forcible suppression and unqualified intimidation of his adversaries, the ruthless crushing of opposition, was the only way of stabilizing totalitarian power. At first Calvin had been content to paralyse the republican minority in the Genevese Town Council by a manipulation of votes. At each successive sitting of that body, additional Protestant refugees from France, men materially and morally dependent upon himself, were granted the privileges of citizenship in Geneva, being thus given the vote. Thereby the opinion of the Town Council was moulded in his favour. Official positions were packed with his adherents; and the influence of the republican party was sedulously undermined. Though patriotic Genevese of the old school were not slow to perceive that foreigners were being systematically preferred, the uneasiness of those democrats who had shed their blood on behalf of the liberties of Geneva was aroused too late. They held secret meetings, to discuss how they could save the last vestiges of independence from the clutches of the Puritans. The public mood grew more

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and more strained. Street brawls between native-born and immigrants became frequent. The injuries that resulted were not serious, only two persons being bruised by stones.

Calvin, however, had merely been waiting for a pretext. He was now able to carry out a *coup d'état* which he had long been preparing. These small bickerings were magnified into a "terrible conspiracy," which was said to have been frustrated "by God's grace alone." The dictator struck one blow after another, arresting the leaders of the republican party, who had had nothing whatever to do with the disturbances. They were racked until the dictator possessed the evidence he required to support his assertion that a massacre had been planned by his opponents. Calvin and his supporters were to have been killed, and foreign troops brought into the city. "Confessions" of this alleged plot having been gained by the most atrocious cruelty, and "treason" having been "proved," the executioner could begin his work. All who had resisted Calvin even in the most trifling way were put to death. Those alone escaped who fled from Geneva. When "justice" had been done, the only political party remaining in the city was Calvin's.

Having purged Geneva of dissentients, Calvin might have been carefree, and therefore magnanimous. But, since the days of Thucydides, Xenophon, and Plutarch, all readers of history and biography have been aware that victorious oligarchs tend to become harsher than ever. The eternal tragedy of despots is that they continue to fear persons of independent mind even when these have been disarmed and gagged. The very fact that a crushed adversary says nothing, but refuses to enrol himself among the toadies and servants of the tyrant, makes his continued existence a source of irritation. Now that

Calvin had rid himself of all his political opponents save one, the theocrat's wrath was intensified by concentration upon this one man, Sebastian Castellio.

Yet it would not be so easy to make an effective onslaught upon Castellio unless he could be induced to break his discreet silence. He had grown weary of open quarrel. Humanists of the Erasmian type are rarely persistent fighters. The customary methods of the partisan, with his unceasing hunt for proselytes, seem to them unworthy of an intelligent man. Having testified to the truth, they feel that it would be a work of supererogation to reiterate their protest. They are rarely propagandists. In the Servetus affair, Castellio had said his say; he had done his best to defend the memory of the martyred Spaniard and had condemned more energetically than any other man of his day the use of violence to subdue conscience. But the times were unfavourable; and he could not fail to see that force would remain in the saddle for an indefinite period. He therefore resolved to wait until the battle between toleration and intolerance could be resumed under more favourable auspices. Disappointed, but with his conviction unshaken, he returned to his studies. Basle University had at length appointed him professor; and he had nearly finished what he regarded as his most important task in life, the translation of the Bible into Latin and French. During the years 1555 and 1556, he desisted from polemic writing.

But Calvin and the Genevese were informed by spies that, within the immediate circle of his friends at the university, he continued to promulgate humanist views. Though his hands were tied, he was still free to speak; and the crusaders of intolerance grew infuriated when they noted that his irrefutable arguments against the doctrine of predestination secured wider and wider acceptance among the students. A man whose strength is predominantly moral exerts an influence by the mere



fact that he exists, for his essence diffuses itself in ever-widening circles, spreading his convictions as ripples spread when a stone is flung into a pool. Since Castellio would not bend, he must be broken. A trap was baited, to lure him back on to the battlefield of "heresy." One of his colleagues at the university was found ready and willing to act as provocative agent. This man sent a friendly letter, couched in terms which implied that the question was purely theoretical, asking Castellio to expound his views with regard to the doctrine of predestination. Castellio agreed to a public debate, but had hardly opened his mouth when one of the audience rose and accused him of heresy. Castellio was quick to realize what was afoot. Instead of springing the trap by defending himself, and thus giving his adversaries justification for their charge, he broke off the discussion, and his colleagues at the university would not allow any further steps to be taken against him. Geneva, however, refused to be discouraged. The first trick having failed, recourse was had to another. Subsequent challenges to public debate being ignored, rumours were circulated and pamphlets issued, in the hope of goading Castellio into the open. His enemies made mock of his translation of the Bible; he was denounced as the author of anonymous libels; the most abominable calumnies were disseminated: as if at the word of command, a storm was raised against him from every quarter of the compass.

The ubiquity and the excesses of the zealots made it clear to all unbiased humanists that an attempt was to be made upon the body and the life of this distinguished and pious scholar, now that he had been deprived of freedom of speech. The venomousness of the persecution brought him much friendly support. Melanchthon, the doyen of the German Reformation, ostentatiously came to the front as one of Castellio's backers. As Erasmus in earlier days, so Melanchthon now was nauseated by the spleen

of those for whom the meaning of life was to be found, not in reconciliation but in quarrels. He addressed a letter to Sebastian Castellio, writing: "Hitherto I have refrained from corresponding with you, being overwhelmed with work. An additional reason for my silence has been my profound regret to notice how grave are the misunderstandings among the friends of wisdom and virtue. Nevertheless, I have always greatly esteemed you because of the way in which you write. This letter of mine is to convey evidence of my general agreement and proof of my earnest sympathy. I trust we shall be united in eternal friendship.

"Your justified complaints, not only as to the differences of opinion that prevail, but also as to the savagery with which certain persons attack the friends of truth, have intensified a sorrow which continually afflicts me. According to classical legend, the giants rose out of the blood of the titans. In like manner, the new sophists who try to reign at courts, in families, and among the masses, and who believe scholars to be a hindrance to their aims, have sprung from the seed of the monks. But God will know how to protect the remnants of His flock.

"Like sages we must endure that which we cannot alter. I find age an alleviation to my distress. I look forward, ere long, to entering the Heavenly Church and to being far removed from the raging storms which so cruelly agitate the Church here below. If I am spared, I shall enjoy discussing many things with you. Farewell."

Melanchthon's hope, in writing as above to Castellio, was that his letter (speedily to be diffused in numerous transcripts) would help to protect Castellio, and would serve as a warning to Calvin to desist from his crazy persecution of that great scholar. Unquestionably, Melanchthon's words of recognition had an effect

throughout the humanist world; and even some of Calvin's intimates advised him to make peace. For instance, the famous scholar and theologian François Baudouin wrote to Geneva: "You can now realize what Melanchthon thinks of the bitterness with which you persecute this man; and also how far Melanchthon is from approving your paradoxes. Is there any sense in your continuing to describe Castellio as a second Satan, while simultaneously honouring Melanchthon as an angel?"

It is, however, futile to attempt to teach or appease a fanatic. Strangely (or logically) enough, Melanchthon's letter acted by contraries on Calvin, whose animus against Castellio was intensified by Melanchthon's championship. Calvin knew only too well that these pacifist intellectuals were more dangerous to his militant dictatorship than were Rome, Loyola, and the members of the Society of Jesus. As regards the latter group of adversaries, it was a case of dogma against dogma, word against word, doctrine against doctrine; but in Castellio's demand for liberty he felt there was involved an attack upon the fundamental principle of his own activities, upon the very idea of unified authority, upon the essential significance of orthodoxy; and, in warfare, a pacifist in the ranks of the commander-in-chief's army is more to be feared than enemies in the open field. For the very reason, therefore, that Melanchthon's letter enhanced Castellio's prestige, Calvin's one desire, henceforward, was to destroy Castellio utterly. The war was a war to the knife.

Just as, in the Servetus affair, when the campaign became a campaign of annihilation, Calvin thrust aside his man of straw, Nicolaus de la Fontaine, and drew his own sword, so now, when he proposed to inflict a crushing blow, he dismissed his hodman de Bèze. He was no longer concerned with right or wrong, with Holy Writ and its interpretation, with truth or falsehood, but only



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with the speedy destruction of Castellio. Yet, at the moment, he could think of no adequate reason for attacking Castellio, who had retired from controversy to resume his learned labours. Since there was no warrant, one must be manufactured, haphazard, at all risks. Any cudgel would do with which to batter the detested Castellio. Calvin seized as his excuse an anonymous lampoon which his spies found in the luggage of a travelling merchant. There was not a shadow of evidence that Castellio was its author; and, indeed; Castellio was not. But, having decided "*Carthaginem esse delendam*"—that Castellio was to be annihilated—Calvin, with rabid and vulgar abuse, fathered the authorship on Castellio. Calvin's polemic *Calumniæ nebulonis cujusdam*, was not a seemingly discussion by one theologian of the views of another, but an outburst of frenzy, wherein, in language unworthy of a drunken bargee, Castellio was reviled as a thief, a rascal, a blasphemer. The professor of the University of Basle was accused of having stolen firewood in broad daylight. The savage opusculum, growing more scurrilous from page to page, ended with the wrathful outcry: "May God destroy you, Satan!"

Calvin's defamatory pamphlet may be regarded as one of the most notable examples of the way in which partisan rancour can debase a man of outstanding intelligence and literary mastership. It can also serve as a warning to statesmen, showing them how foolishly they may behave when they fail to bridle their emotions. Moved by its sense of the terrible wrong here inflicted upon an honourable man, the senate of the University of Basle annulled its previous decision to forbid the publication of Castellio's writings. A university of high standing in Europe did not think it tolerable that one of its stipendiary professors should be accused before the

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humanist world of being a thief, a rogue, and a vagabond. Since manifestly such accusations had nothing to do with a discussion of "doctrine," but were mere vulgar defamation, Castellio was expressly authorized by the senate to make a public rejoinder.

Castellio's reply is an admirable example of humanist polemic. He was so tolerant a man that his adversaries' hatred could not poison his mind, nor could any baseness on their part render him base. A distinguished calm breathes through the opening periods. "Not with enthusiasm do I enter this path of public discussion. I should have greatly preferred to come to a brotherly understanding with you, in the spirit of Christ, and not to adopt this boorish method of mutual accusations, which cannot fail to injure the prestige of our Church. But since you and your friends have frustrated my dream of peaceful collaboration, it seems to me incompatible with my duty as a Christian to abstain from answering your passionate onslaught, with all due moderation." Castellio went on to expose the crookedness of Calvin's methods, for Calvin, in the first edition of the *Calumniae*, publicly asserted that Castellio was the author of the aforesaid anonymous pamphlet; but in his second edition, the Genevese dictator, having been by that time doubtless convinced of error, withdrew the charge, letting the matter go by default, without any frank admission that he had accused Castellio unjustly. Castellio, however, nailed the lie to the counter: "Yes or no. Were you aware that you had no warrant for naming me as author of that pamphlet? How can I tell? But either you brought your accusation at a time when you already knew that it was unjustified; in that case, you were cheating. Or else you were still uncertain; and then your charge was heedlessly brought. In either event, your behaviour was unworthy, for every point of your contention is false. I did not write that pamphlet, nor did I

send it to be printed in Paris. If its diffusion was a criminal offence, the crime was yours, for it was through you that the writing first became widely known."

Having shown how threadbare had been Calvin's pretext for attacking him, Castellio turned to pillory the unpolished form of the invective. "You have an ample store of abusive terms at your command, and, speaking out of the fulness of your heart, you have let your tongue run away with you. In your Latin libellus you call me, without drawing breath, blasphemmer, calumniator, malefactor, yapping cur, an impudent wretch full of ignorance and bestiality, an impious misreader of Holy Writ, a fool who mocks at God, a despiser of the faith, a man without shame, a dirty dog, a being full of disrespect and obnoxiousness, a distorted and perverted spirit, a vagabond, and a '*mauvais sujet*.' Eight times you call me a rapsallion (at least that I take to be the meaning you attach to the word '*nebulo*'). These malicious terms are the ones you delight in interspersing through two sheets of printed matter, while you have chosen as title of your book *Calumnies of a Rapsallion*. Its last sentence runs: 'May God destroy you, Satan!' From the title to the conclusion, the whole work is penned in the same style, although the author is reputed to be a man inspired by apostolic earnestness, by Christian gentleness. Woe unto those whom you lead, if they are infected by such moods, and if it should prove that your disciples resemble their master. But these invectives do not touch me in the least. . . . Some day truth will prevail, and you, Calvin, will have to account to God for the abuse you have showered on one to save whom, as to save yourself, Christ died. Is it possible that you are not ashamed, that you cannot remember Jesus's own words: 'Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment, and whoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council'?" Serenely, now,



uplifted by a sovereign sense of inviolability, Castellio went on to defend himself against Calvin's most serious accusation, that he, Castellio, had stolen firewood in Basle. "Certainly," he writes ironically, "it would be a grave offence if I had committed it. But calumny is an equally serious matter. Let us assume that the charge is true, and that I really stole wood because I, in the terms of your doctrine, was predestined to do so. Why should you revile me on that account? Should you not rather have compassion on me because God foreordained me to such a fate, and therefore made it impossible that I should not steal? If that be so, why should you fill the heavens with outcries and denunciations? To prevent my stealing any more? But if I am a thief because of divine predestination, you must in your writings acquit me of blame, since I act under coercion. On your own showing I could as little refrain from theft as, by taking thought, add a cubit to my stature."

Having thus made merry over Calvin's preposterous accusation, Castellio went on to explain upon what a slender foundation the charge had been built up. Like hundreds of others, during a freshet in the Rhine, he had with a grappling-hook hauled driftwood out of the river. This was permissible, for not only was driftwood treasure-trove to any one, but the citizens of Basle were, by the town authorities, especially invited to retrieve it, since, when the river was in flood, floating logs were a peril to the bridges. Castellio was in a position to prove that the Basle municipal authorities had paid him, and certain other "thieves," a reward of "*quaternos solidos*" (a respectable sum of money) for having committed the "theft." After reading this rebuttal, even the zealots of Geneva made no further attempts to revive a ridiculous calumny which dishonoured, not Castellio, but Calvin.

No mendacity, and no attempt to gloss over the matter, could save Calvin's face. The dictator, eager to do any-

thing in his power that would sweep a political enemy out of the way, had tampered with the truth just as he had done in the Servetus affair. Castellio's character was unspotted. "Let those judge who please to do so," he wrote to Calvin. "I fear no man's opinion, if he judge without bias or hatred. Those who have known me since childhood know that I have always lived in needy circumstances, as numberless persons can testify. Must I call witnesses? Do you not yourself know what my life has been? Your own pupils have had ample opportunity of recognizing that no one can entertain the least doubt as to the uprightness of my behaviour. This being so, the only charge they can bring against me is that my doctrine does not coincide with yours, and that therefore I must be in error. But how can you dare to diffuse such scandalous reports about me, and to call upon God's name in this connection? Do you not see, Calvin, how terrible it is to call God to bear witness on behalf of accusations which are inspired exclusively by hate and anger?"

"I, too, can call upon God; and since you have called upon Him in order to support your reckless accusations against me, I appeal to Him because you have accused me unjustly. If I am lying and you are speaking the truth, then I pray that God will punish me according to the measure of my transgression, and I beg my fellow-men to deprive me of life and honour. But if I have spoken the truth and you are a false accuser, I pray that God will shield me against the pitfalls set by an adversary. I also pray that before your death He will give you opportunity of repenting your conduct, that the sin you have committed may not imperil your salvation."

How different is the tone from Calvin's; the tone of a free-spirited and unprejudiced man as against the tone

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of a man congealed in self-assurance. Eternal is the contrast between the disposition of the humanist and that of the doctrinaire, between the nonchalant man whose only desire is to maintain his right to have his own opinion, and the positive-minded authoritarian who can never rest till all the world has said ditto to himself. A man whose conscience is pure and clear speaks moderately, but the zealot spouts threats and hatred. There can be no clarity in a mind clouded by hate. Truly spiritual deeds cannot be performed by a fanatic, and are only at the command of one who, in silence and calm, has learned self-control and moderation.

Partisans, however, are never concerned with justice, but only with victory. They never want to concede another's point, but only to uphold their own. As soon as Castellio's rejoinder appeared, the assault on him was renewed. True, personal abuse of the "dog," the "beast" Castellio, and the absurd fable as to the theft of wood, were quietly withdrawn. Even Calvin did not dare continue cutting into this kerf. Hastily the line of attack was transferred to the theological field. Once more the Genevese printing presses were set in motion, and for the second time Théodore de Bèze was sent into the breach. More loyal to his master than to truth, in the official Genevese edition of the Bible (1558) he prefaced Holy Writ with so malicious an attack on Castellio that, in such a setting, it reads like blasphemy. "Satan, our old opponent," writes de Bèze, "having recognized that he cannot, as of yore, arrest the progress of God's word, uses even more dangerous methods. For a long time, there was no French translation of the Bible, or at least no translation worthy of the name. Now Satan has found as many translators as there are frivolous and impudent minds; and he will probably find even more, unless God give them pause before it is too late. If the reader asks me for an example, let me refer to Sebastian



Castellio's translation of the Bible into Latin and French—Castellio being a man whose name is well known to our Church because of his ingratitude and impudence, and also because so much trouble has been taken in the vain endeavour to keep him on the right path. We therefore regard it as a conscientious duty to break the silence we have hitherto kept, and to warn all Christians against this man, the chosen of Satan."

It would be difficult to denounce a scholar in plainer terms as a heretic. Castellio, however, "chosen of Satan," need no longer keep silence. Encouraged by Melanchthon's letter, the senate of the university had restored the persecuted man's freedom of expression. Castellio's answer to de Bèze is profoundly, one might almost say mystically, sad. He can only feel sorrowful that men who profess devotion to the things of the spirit should surrender to such uncontrolled hatred. He knew well enough that the Calvinists were not trying to spread truth, but only to maintain the monopolist position of their own doctrines; and that they would not rest until they had swept him out of their path, as they had previously swept theoretical and political adversaries. For his part, he refused to descend into such abysses of hate. "You are inciting the authorities to compass my death," he wrote prophetically. "Were it not that your books make this plain to all who read them, I should never venture such an allegation, however convinced I may be of its truth. You know that as soon as I am dead, it will be impossible for me to answer you. You find my continued existence a nightmare. Since you perceive that the authorities will not yield, or at any rate have not yet yielded to your pressure, you try to make me generally hated, and to discredit me in the eyes of the world." Though he was absolutely assured that his enemies sought his life, Castellio was satisfied to appeal to their consciences. "Tell me, please," he said to these

professed servants of Christ, "in what respect can you justify your attitude towards me by an appeal to Jesus? Even when Judas was handing Him over to the myrmidons of authority, Jesus spoke in kindly tones to His false disciple, and, on the cross, He prayed for those who were putting Him to death. But what are you doing? Because I differ from you in respect of certain doctrines and shades of opinion, you persecute me wherever I may be, and urge others to treat me no less despitely than you do yourselves. How bitter it must be to you, in the depths of your hearts, to know that such conduct as yours received His unqualified condemnation. For instance: 'Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer.' These are simple truths, accessible in the Scriptures to those who consult the sacred writings with minds freed from theological distortion. You yourselves pay lip-service with spoken words and in your books. Why do you not apply the same doctrine in your daily lives?"

Castellio knew well enough that de Bèze was only an underling sent as forerunner. Calvin, despot in the realm of conscience as well as in the real world, was the true source of the murderous hatred clamouring for Castellio's destruction. Castellio, therefore, ignoring de Bèze, addressed himself directly to Calvin. "You style yourself a Christian, you appeal to the gospels, you take your stand upon God's word, and boast that your mind is wholly devoted to fulfilling God's intentions. You believe yourself well acquainted with evangelical truth. But if you would teach others, why do you not begin with teaching yourself? How do you dare fulminate from the pulpit against those who bear false witness, when your own writings are continually bearing false witness? Why, apparently in the hope of breaking my pride, do you condemn me with as much arrogance and self-assurance as if you were sitting at God's right hand and He had revealed to you all the secrets of His heart? Look

within, before it is too late. Try, if it be still possible, to doubt your own all-sufficingness for a moment, and then you may be able to see what many others see. Rid yourself of the self-love which consumes you, and of the hatred you feel for so many persons, especially myself. Let us vie with one another in kindly consideration, and then you will discover that my alleged impiety is no less unreal than was the disgraceful offence which you tried to fix upon me. Put up with my diverging from you a little in matters of doctrine. Is it impossible that two pious persons may have differences of opinion, and yet be at one in their hearts?"

Surely no one attacked by doctrinaires and zealots, has ever answered them in a more humane and conciliatory spirit? This is no mere matter of words, for Castellio is himself a living example of toleration in the struggle which has been forced on him. Instead of answering scorn with scorn, hatred with hatred, he writes: "I know of no country to which I could have fled if I had brought such charges against you as you have brought against me," going on to renew his attempt at such a kindly settlement of the dispute as, in his view, a dispute between intellectuals should always have. Once more he holds out the hand of peace and friendship, although his opponents are sharpening the axe for his neck. "For the love of Christ I implore you to respect my liberty, and cease to overwhelm me with false accusations. Let me preserve my own faith uncoerced, as you preserve yours with my full approval. Do not continue to believe that he who differs from you must be wrong, and deserves to be burnt as a heretic. . . . When I see how so many other pious persons interpret Holy Writ in different ways from yourself, it makes me turn with more devotion to my own faith in Christ. Unquestionably one of us two must be mistaken, but that need not prevent our loving one another. The Master will some day guide the strayed



sheep back into the right path. The only thing either of us certainly knows (or ought to know) is the duty of Christian charity. Let us practise this, and by practising it close our adversaries' mouths. You believe your opinions to be right. Others believe the same of their opinions. Well, let the wisest among us show themselves the most brotherly. Let us not pride ourselves on our own wisdom. God knows all; and we must remember that He 'hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.'

"I penned these words when my heart was filled with desire for love. I offer you love and a Christian peace. I appeal to you to show love towards me, calling God and the Holy Ghost to witness that I do so out of the depths of my heart.

"If, despite all I can do, you continue to attack me with hatred in your heart, if I cannot persuade you to love me as a Christian should love his brother, I can only keep silence. May God be our judge, deciding between you and me in accordance with the degree to which we have served Him faithfully."

It seems almost incredible that so moving an appeal for reconciliation should have been fruitless. But one of the contradictions of our mortal nature is that ideologues, being in thrall to one narrow idea, are blind to all other ideas, and therefore cannot be moved by such appeals, humane though they be. Bias in thought inevitably leads to injustice in action; and when a man or a nation is a prey to the fanaticism of a restricted outlook, there is no space for mutual understanding and toleration. Castellio's moving appeal made no impression whatever upon Calvin. What was it but the appeal of a man eager for peace, who did not preach in public, did not dispute, had no desire to impose his own views by force on any

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other living person? The pious Genevese pastor rejected as "monstrous" this appeal to Christian peace. All he did was to start a new devil's tattoo against Castellio, reinforced by the poison gases of contempt and incitation. Another lie was launched, in the hope of exposing Castellio to suspicion or at least to ridicule. Perhaps this was the most perfidious of all Calvin's onslaughts. Although attendance at dramatic performances was regarded as a sin in Geneva, in the Genevese seminary Calvin's disciples staged a "pious" school comedy in which Castellio, under the thin disguise *De parvo Castello*, appeared as Satan's chief servant, and in which he was made to say :

*Quant à moy, un chacun je sers  
Pour argent en prose oy en vers  
Aussi ne vis-je d'aultre chose. . . .*

This gross calumny, that a man whose life had been passed in apostolic poverty had sold his pen, and that the advocate of toleration was a salaried agitator on behalf of the papacy, was voiced by permission, nay, by encouragement of the leaders in Geneva. But the rancour of the Calvinists had long since made them unable to distinguish between truth and calumny. All they cared about was getting Castellio deprived of his professorial chair at Basle, seeing to it that his writings should be burned, and, if possible, himself burned as well.

These good haters were now favoured by fortune. During one of the customary house-to-house visitations in Geneva, two burghers were found conning a book which lacked Calvin's *imprimatur*. There was no author's name on the title-page or colophon, nor any place of publication mentioned. But all the more for that did the opusculc, *Conseil à la France désolée*, smell of heresy. The two readers were promptly brought before the Consistory. Dreading thumbscrew and rack, they hastened

to acknowledge that one of Castellio's nephews had lent them this *Conseil*. Impetuously the hunters followed up the fresh trail, hoping, at last, to bring their quarry to bay.

In very truth the book, "evil, because crammed with errors," was a new work by Castellio. He had lapsed into his old "error." Incurable, it seemed, was his Erasmian desire for a peaceful settlement of the conflict that raged within the Church. He could not remain silent when, in his beloved France, religious persecution was beginning to reap a bloody harvest, and when the Protestants, incited by the Genevese, were taking up arms against the Catholics. As if he could foresee the Massacre of St. Bartholomew and the horrors of the Huguenot wars, he felt impelled, at the eleventh hour, to demonstrate the futility of such bloodshed. Not one doctrine, nor the other, he explained, was, in itself, erroneous; but invariably false and criminal was the attempt to constrain a man to a belief he did not hold. All the evil on earth arose out of this "*forcement des consciences*"; continually renewed was the bloodthirsty attempt of narrow-minded fanatics to impose constraints upon conscience. However, as Castellio goes on to show, it is not only immoral and illegal to try and constrain any one to avow acceptance of a belief to which he is opposed; but it is also foolish, nonsensical. Such a pressgang to gather in recruits for the support of a philosophy or a creed can only secure hypocrites. The thumbscrew, the rack, or any other such constraint, achieves no more than a nominal increase in the membership of a party. Proselytes are gained at the cost of a mathematical falsification whereby genuine adherents are deceived as well as the outer world. Castellio writes, in words that are universally applicable: "Those who wish to win over the largest possible number of supporters willy-nilly, resemble a fool who has a barrel containing only a little wine, and fills it up with water in order to have more



wine. The result is, not to increase the wine, but to spoil the good wine which the fool already had. It is preposterous to assert that those who are forced to profess a belief, really believe what they profess. Were they free to follow their own inclinations they would say: 'What I sincerely believe is that you are unjust and tyrannical, and that what you have compelled me to profess is false.' Bad wine is not made good by forcing people to drink it."

Again and again, therefore, and ever more vigorously, does Castellio reaffirm his conviction that intolerance will inevitably lead to war, and that only through toleration can peace be achieved. A philosophy or a religion cannot be established by thumbscrews, battle-axes, and big guns, but only by influencing individuals to accept a conviction without constraint; by true understanding alone can wars be avoided and ideas linked together. Let us, therefore, leave those to be Protestants who wish to be Protestants, and those to remain Catholics who are honestly so disposed, trying to constrain neither one set of persons nor the other. A generation before the rival creeds were reconciled at Nantes over the tombs of myriads who had been senselessly sacrificed, a lonely and distressful humanist foreshadowed the edict which was to establish toleration in France. "My counsel to you, France, is that you should cease the constraint, the persecution, and the murder of conscience, and, instead of that, you should allow every one who believes in Christ to do so in his own way."

It need hardly be said that in Geneva a proposal to reconcile French Catholics and French Protestants was regarded as a heinous crime. At that very moment, Calvin was secretly trying to incite the French Huguenots to take up arms. Nothing could be less accordant with his aggressive ecclesiastical policy than Castellio's

humanist and pacifist proposals. The dictator pulled all possible strings to secure the suppression of Castellio's *Conseil*. Messengers were speeded to every point of the compass, bearing hortatory letters to the Protestant authorities. So effective was Calvin's organization, that in August, 1563, at the General Synod of the Reformed Churches, a resolution was passed as follows: "The Church is hereby informed of the appearance of a book entitled *Conseil à la France désolée* penned by Castellio. This is an extremely dangerous work, and the faithful are warned to be on their guard against it."

Once more the zealots succeeded in suppressing a "dangerous" work by Castellio before it had been circulated. Yes, the book was suppressed, but what about the author, this imperturbable, inflexible, anti-dogmatic and anti-doctrinaire philosopher. An end must be made of him. Gagging was not enough; his spine must be broken. Once more Théodore de Bèze was called in to use the garotte. His *Responsio ad defensiones et reprehensiones Sebastiani Castellionis*, dedicated to the pastors of the town of Basle, showed (if by this dedication alone) what sort of steps were to be taken against Castellio. "It is time, and more than time," such was de Bèze's insinuation, "that religious justice shall deal with this heretic and friend of heretics." In a spate of defamatory language, the pious theologian pilloried Castellio as a liar, blasphemer, wicked Anabaptist, desecrator of sacred doctrine, stinking sycophant, protector, not only of all heretics, but likewise of all adulterers and criminals. To conclude, he was stigmatized as an assassin whose weapons of defence had been forged in Satan's smithy. True, de Bèze, in his fury, mixed his opprobrious epithets so indiscriminately that many of them cancelled one another out. Still, what clearly emerged from this volcanic tumult was the determination to gag Castellio once for all, if possible by taking his life.

The fanatics had plainly disclosed their intention to have Castellio put on trial for heresy; the denunciation stepped shamelessly into the open, without a fig leaf. A plain appeal had been made to the Basle synod to set the civil authorities straightway to work. Castellio was to be arrested as a public enemy. Unfortunately, however, there was a trifling obstacle to prevent the immediate carrying out of this amiable intention. By the laws of Basle, a prosecution could not be opened without a written indictment having been laid before the authorities, and the mere existence of a disapproved book would not suffice. In these circumstances, the obviously proper course would be for Calvin and de Bèze to bring the charge against Castellio. But Calvin followed his well-tried tactics, preferring to remain in the background while urging others to step into the breach. The method adopted against Servetus in Vienne and in Geneva would be the most appropriate. In November, 1563, immediately after de Bèze's book had been published, a completely unqualified person, Adam von Bodenstein by name, brought before the Basle authorities a written plaint against Castellio on the ground of heresy. Assuredly this Adam von Bodenstein was the last man entitled to assume the role of defender of orthodoxy, being a son of the notorious Karlstadt, whom Luther had expelled from the university of Wittenberg, as a dangerous fanatic; besides, being a pupil of the distinctly irreligious Paracelsus, it was absurd for him to pose as an upright pillar of the Protestant Church. Nevertheless Bodenstein's indictment reiterated the confused arguments of de Bèze's book, wherein Castellio was simultaneously described as a Papist, an Anabaptist, a free thinker, a blasphemer, and, in addition, a protector of adulterers and criminals. No matter whether the charges were true or false; with the lodging of this written accusation (which is still extant) the legal



requirements had been fulfilled. Now the Basle authorities had no other choice than to initiate a prosecution. Calvin and company had secured their aim; Castellio must sit on the penitent's form.

Surely it would be easy for Castellio to defend himself against the aforesaid accusations? In excess of zeal, Bodenstein had charged him with such contradictory offences that the absurdity of the indictment was manifest. Besides, every one in Basle knew Castellio's life to be blameless. The upshot was that the accused was not, as Servetus had been, promptly arrested, loaded with chains, gaoled, and maltreated, but, as a professor in the university, summoned before the senate to answer the charges.

He declared (as was true) that his accuser Bodenstein was a man of straw, and insisted that Calvin and de Bèze, being the real instigators of the prosecution, ought to appear in person. "Since I am attacked with so much venom, I earnestly beg you to give me an opportunity of defending myself. If Calvin and de Bèze are acting in good faith, let them come into court and prove that I have committed the offences with which they charge me. If they believe themselves to have acted rightly, they have no reason to dread the tribunal of Basle, since they made no ado about attacking me before the whole world. . . . I know my accusers to be influential, but God, likewise, is mighty, and He judges without distinction of persons. I am aware that I am an obscure individual, lowly placed and comparatively unknown; but God keeps watch over the lowly, and will demand atonement if their blood should be unjustly shed. I acknowledge the jurisdiction of the court, and declare that if I am guilty of any of the things with which I am charged, my head ought to answer for it."

Calvin and de Bèze were unwilling to comply with so frank a demand. Neither of them appeared before the senate of Basle University. It seemed as if the malicious denunciation would go up in a cloud of smoke, when chance rendered Castellio's enemies unexpected aid. Something came to light which gave disastrous support to the suspicion of heresy and friendliness to heretics attaching to Castellio. A strange thing was disclosed. For twelve years a wealthy foreigner, ostensibly of noble birth, had been living in the canton of Basle, at the château of Binningen. He was known as Jean de Bruges, and was highly respected and loved in bourgeois circles. He died in 1556, and the Baslers turned out in force to attend his sumptuous funeral, when the coffin was placed in the vaults of the church of St. Leonard. Years had elapsed when an almost incredible report began to gain ground, it being asserted that the distinguished foreigner had not been a nobleman or merchant, but none other than the infamous and outlawed arch-heretic, David Joris, author of the *Wonder Boek*—a man who had mysteriously disappeared from Flanders in the days of the massacre of the Anabaptists. Greatly were the Baslers discountenanced to learn that they had paid such high honour, both during life and after death, to a man who had been an enemy of the true faith! To atone for the misuse the impostor had made of their hospitality, the long-deceased offender was solemnly tried by the authorities. The body of the heretic was exhumed, the mass of corruption was hanged for a time on the public gallows, and then, in the market-place of Basle, was burned, together with a number of heretical writings. The gruesome spectacle was witnessed by thousands of spectators—among these being, perforce, Castellio, side by side with the other professors of the university. Imagine their feelings. David Joris, during his exile in Basle, had been bound to Castellio by the ties of close



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friendship. They had joined hands in the attempt to rescue Servetus; and it seems probable that Joris was one among the group of anonymous authors of "Martinus Bellius's" *De haereticis*. This much may be regarded as certain, that Castellio had never believed the inmate of the château of Binningen to be the simple merchant that refugee had proclaimed himself, but must have known from the first the true identity of the alleged Jean de Bruges. Nevertheless, as tolerant in actual life as in his writings, Castellio would never have played the informer, or have refused to extend the hand of friendship to a man, though the latter had been outlawed by all the Churches and all the civil authorities in the world.

None the less, the disclosure of Castellio's suspect relationships with the most notorious of the Anabaptists gave untimely support to the Calvinist accusation. It was plain that Castellio had, in very truth, been a protector and patron of one arch-heretic. Why not, then, of all? Since misfortunes seldom come singly, at the same moment evidence was adduced to show that Castellio had been in close touch with another much maligned heretic, Bernardino Ochino. At one time a Franciscan monk, and vicar-general of the Capuchins, renowned throughout Italy for his sermons, Ochino fell under the ban of the Inquisition and fled to Switzerland. Even there, after becoming a pastor of the Reformed Church, he aroused alarm by the advanced nature of his views. Above all, his last book, *Thirty Dialogues*, contained an interpretation of the Bible which was regarded as blasphemous by the whole Protestant world; for Bernardino Ochino, quoting the Mosaic Law, affirmed that polygamy (though he did not venture to recommend it) was theoretically admissible, and was sanctioned by the Bible.

This book, containing the aforesaid scandalous thesis, and voicing many other opinions regarded by the ortho-



dox as outrageous, was translated by Castellio from Italian into Latin. The heretical treatise was printed in its Latin dress, so that Castellio was unquestionably responsible for the diffusion of most "abominable" views. Proceedings had already been taken against Ochino; and it was natural that, under present conditions, the translator should be regarded as a confederate, and as no less blameworthy than the Italian author. Thus betwixt night and morning Calvin's and de Bèze's vague assertions that Castellio was a focus of the most dangerous heresies, had been given substantial support by the disclosure of his intimacy with David Joris and Bernardino Ochino. It was not to be expected that Basle University would continue to extend a protective hand over such a man. Castellio's cause was lost before the trial began.

What a Protestant advocate of toleration might expect from the intolerance of his contemporaries, Castellio could have learned from the fate of his friend Bernardino Ochino—though the latter's cup of sorrows was not filled before Castellio had himself passed away. Ochino, who had for some time been pastor to the Italian refugees in Zurich, was expelled from that city, where the authorities would not even grant him the respite he besought. He was seventy-six, destitute, and had recently been widowed; but these misfortunes secured him no pity. The pious theologians were glad to drive him into renewed exile accompanied by his innocent children. It was mid-winter, and the upland roads were deep in snow. So much the better, thought his adversaries, who would have been glad if the unfortunate old man had died by the wayside. Well, he must seek refuge somewhere, anywhere, in the world. The fanatics who had expelled him were determined to strew difficulties in his path. Lest the compassionate should be over-ready to provide him and his children with warmth and shelter,

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they sent letters speeding before him, warning good Christians to close their doors against such a wretch, who must be treated as if he were a leper. The aged scholar left Switzerland as a beggar, struggling through the snow, sleeping in barns; moved northward across Germany by way of Nuremberg, where also the Protestant congregations had been cautioned against him, but where he was allowed to stay for a time; his last hope being to find in Poland kindly persons to give him and his children sustenance and shelter. But even in Poland, intolerance was too much for him. He fled to Moravia, died there in penury towards the end of 1564 or 1565, and was committed, like a vagabond, to a now forgotten grave.

Castellio, who was acquainted with the earlier stages of his friend Ochino's long-drawn-out martyrdom, knew that he himself might expect a similar fate. He was to be tried as a heretic, and the man whose only crime was that of having been too humane, could look for neither humanity nor compassion in an era of such universal inhumanity. Servetus's defender might suffer Servetus's fate. The intolerance of the sixteenth century had laid a strangler's hand on the throat of its most dangerous adversary, the apostle of toleration.

Happily, however, the zealots were denied the supreme triumph of seeing Sebastian Castellio perish in prison, in exile, or at the stake. Death rescued him from his ruthless adversaries. For a long time his physique had been undermined by overwork; and his strength was not able to stand up against so many sorrows and so much excitement. Down to the last, fighting valiantly though vainly, Castellio went on with his occupations at the university and in his study. He was forced to take to his bed at last, having been seized with uncontrollable vomiting, until finally his overtaxed heart resigned its task. On December 29, 1563, Sebastian Castellio died

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at the age of forty-eight, being thus, "by God's help, snatched from the claws of his enemies"—as a sympathetic friend phrased it when all was over.

His death put an end to the campaign of calumny. Too late, his fellow citizens recognized how lukewarm they had been in the defence of the most worthy among the inhabitants of Basle. The scantiness of his estate showed how poverty-stricken had been this great scholar. There was not a fragment of silver-ware left in the house. His friends had to provide funeral expenses, pay his trifling debts, and take charge of his children. As if in recompense for the shamefulness of the accusation of heresy, Sebastian Castellio's interment was a moral triumph. Those who had timidly drawn away from him after the charge of heresy had been brought, were now eager to show how much they loved and honoured him. The funeral train was followed by all the members of the university, the coffin being borne to the cathedral on the shoulders of students, and interred there in the crypt. At their own cost, three hundred of his pupils provided a tombstone on which were chiselled the words: "To our renowned teacher, in gratitude for his extensive knowledge and in commemoration of the purity of his life."



## Chapter 9

### EXTREMES MEET

*Le temps est troublé, le temps se esclarsira  
Après la pluie l'on atent le beau temps  
Après noises et grans divers contens  
Paix adviendra et maleur cessera!*

*Mais entre deux quel mal l'on souffrera!*

—CHANSON DE MARGUERITE D'AUTRICHE.

THE struggle seemed over. By clearing Castellio out of the way Calvin had rid himself of the only adversary endowed with outstanding intelligence. Having, simultaneously, silenced his political opponents in Geneva, the dictator could, unhindered, develop his policy. As soon as dictators have surpassed the inevitable crises of early days, they can usually regard their position as secure for a considerable time. Just as the human organism, after a period of discomfort, becomes acclimatized to new physical surroundings, so, likewise, do the nations adapt themselves to new methods of rule. After a while the members of the older generation, who bitterly compare the extant regime of force with their memory of earlier and easier days, die out, while the younger folk, who have no such memories, grow up in the new tradition which they take for granted. In the course of a generation, people can be decisively modified by an idea; and thus it came to pass that, after two decades of Calvin's theocracy, the dictator's new decalogue had progressed from its condition of theological conceptualism and had assumed material form. In justice we

have to admit that this talented organizer set to work after his initial victory with wise deliberation, expanding his system gradually until it became world-wide. In respect of behaviour, the iron order he established made Geneva exemplary. From all parts of the western world, members of the Reformed Churches journeyed as pilgrims to the "Protestant Rome" that they might admire so admirable a specimen of a theocratic regime. What rigid discipline and spartan endurance could achieve, was achieved to the full. Granted, dynamic variety was sacrificed to monotony, and joy to a mathematical correctness; but, in return, education was raised to a niche among the arts. Schools, universities, and welfare institutions, were beyond compare; the sciences were sedulously cultivated; and with the foundation of the Academy, Calvin not only brought into being the first intellectual centre of Protestantism, but at the same time set up a counterpart to the Society of Jesus created by his sometime fellow student Loyola—logical discipline being contraposed to logical discipline, and a steeled will to a steeled will. Splendidly equipped with theological armaments, preachers and agitators were sent forth from Geneva to spread Calvinist doctrines. The Master had made up his mind long ago that his authority and his teaching should not be restricted to this one Swiss town. His will-to-power forced him to extend his sway over lands and seas, in the hope that Europe, nay the world, would accept his totalitarian system. Scotland was already under his thumb, thanks to the activities of his legate, John Knox; Holland, Scandinavia, Denmark, and parts of Germany, had been permeated by the Puritan spirit; in France, the Huguenots were rallying to strike a decisive blow: if favoured by fortune, the *Institutio* might become a universal institution, and Calvinism might be established as the unified method of thought and behaviour of western civilization.

How decisively such a victory would have modified European culture, is shown by the imprint of Calvinism on the lands where it speedily became supreme. Wherever the Genevese Church was able to enforce the moral and religious dictatorship to which it aspired—even though that dictatorship was fleeting—a peculiar character was stamped upon national life. The citizens, or subjects, tended to become persons who “spotlessly” fulfilled their moral and religious obligations; sensuality and libertarianism were tamed and domesticated until they were methodically controlled; life assumed dun, drab hues. So effectively can a strong personality immortalize itself in the daily life of a people, that to this day, in towns where Calvinism was for a time dominant, the casual observer in the streets can recognize its enduring influence, as displayed in a moderation of demeanour, in a lack of emphasis as regards dress and behaviour, and even in the sobriety of architecture. Bridling everywhere the impetuous demands of individualism, strengthening everywhere the grip of the authorities, Calvinism elaborated, wherever it held sway, the type of the good servant, of the man who modestly but persistently subordinates himself to the community—in a word, the type of the excellent official and the ideally perfect member of the middle class. There is considerable truth in the assertion that no other factor has worked so powerfully as Calvinism to promote the unprotesting obedience essential for the success of industrialism; for Calvinism inculcated upon the young as a religious duty, the unquestioning acceptance of equalization and mechanization. It must never be forgotten that a State enhances its military strength by the resolute organization of its subjects. Those marvellously tough, tenacious, and frugal navigators and colonists who conquered and settled new continents, first for Holland, and then for England, were mainly of Puritan



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origin. These Puritan stocks helped to mould the North American character so that the United States and Canada owe a large portion of their immense success to the educational influence of the doctrinaire preacher from Picardy.

Assuredly, we who are living four centuries after the death of Erasmus, after Geneva's determination to live exclusively according to the gospels and God's word, and Calvin's first coming to Geneva—have good reason for congratulating ourselves that the famous "discipline" was not, in its more trenchant form, successfully established throughout Protestant Europe. Hostile to beauty, happiness, life itself, the Calvinists raged against the splendour of vital expansion and against the spendthrift magnificence of the arts. Their exacting and orderly system placed a ban upon creative interpretations and cast a pall over the blaze of colour which, during the Renaissance, had given western Europe its empery in the history of civilization. Just as for centuries to come in Geneva they emasculated art; just as, on getting control of England, they hastened to trample underfoot one of the most beautiful blossoms in the world of spirit, the Shakespearean theatre; just as they purged the churches of pictures and statuary, inculcating the fear of the Lord as a substitute for human delight—so, all over Europe, they decreed that enthusiasm was only to be tolerated as a form of piety drawing men nearer to God. Other manifestations of enthusiasm were ruthlessly condemned as opposed to their interpretation of the Mosaic Law. A queer world it would have been had they achieved their end. The European spirit, undergoing atrophy, would have contented itself with theological hairsplitting, instead of unfolding and transforming itself without cessation. For the world remains barren and uncreative if it be not fertilized by liberty and joy; and life is frozen stiff when trammelled by a rigid system.

Happily, Europe did not allow itself to be disciplined, puritanized, "Genevesed," any more than non-Lacedaemonian Hellas would be dragooned by Spartan severity. Calvinist rigidity was victorious only in a small part of Europe; and even there it speedily abdicated. Calvin's theocracy could not for long impose itself upon any State; and, soon after the dictator's death, stubborn realities mitigated the harshness of his would-be inexorable "discipline." In the end, warm sensuality proved stronger than abstract doctrine. With its vigorous juices, it permeates that which attempts to shackle it, breaking all bonds and tempering every asperity. Just as a muscle cannot remain tensed for an unlimited time or a passion persist enduringly at a white heat, so a dictatorship in the realm of the spirit cannot everlastingly maintain its ruthless radicalism. Indeed, it seldom endures for more than one generation.

Thus Calvin's intolerant discipline was modified sooner than might have been expected. Rarely, after the lapse of a century, does a doctrine resemble closely what it was when first promulgated and we should make a grave mistake were we to suppose the later Calvinism to be identical with the Calvinism of Calvin. No doubt, even in the days of Jean Jacques Rousseau, the Genevese were still anxiously discussing whether the theatre ought or ought not to be forbidden, and were actually asking themselves whether the "fine arts" denoted the progress or the doom of mankind—but long ere this the harsh angles of Calvinism had been rounded off, and rigid interpretations of the word of God had been adapted to human needs. The spirit of development knows how to modify its creatures for its own mysterious purposes. Eternal progress accepts from every system no more than is desirable, throwing away restrictive products as we throw away the skin of a fruit. In the great plan which mankind fulfils, dictators are but temporary forces; and

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what aspires to hedge the rhythm of life within a field of reaction, achieves its aim only for a season, to lead, then, to a yet more energetic escape. Thus by a strange modification, Calvinism, with its fierce determination to hamper individual liberty, gave birth to the idea of political liberty. Holland, Cromwell's England, and the United States of America, the three countries where modern liberalism was first conceived, gave ample scope to the liberal and democratic ideas of the State. One of the most important of latter-day documents, the Declaration of Independence of the United States, issued from the Puritan spirit; while that Declaration, in turn, exercised a decisive influence upon the shaping of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. Strangest transformation scene of all when extremes met. The lands which were to be most thoroughly steeped in intolerance became the foci of toleration in Europe. In the very places where Calvin's religion had been law, Castellio's ideal was subsequently realized. That Geneva, where Calvin had burned Servetus because the Spaniard dared to differ in opinion from the dictator, became, in due time, the place of refuge for the living Antichrist of his day, Voltaire, "God's enemy." This "Antichrist" was courteously visited by Calvin's successors in office, the preachers at the cathedral of St. Pierre, who did not hesitate to engage in philosophic discussions with the blasphemer. In Holland, again, men who could find rest nowhere else on earth, Descartes and Spinoza, wrote books that were to free mankind from the fetters of ecclesiasticism and tradition. Renan, little disposed to talk of miracles, declared it to be a miracle that rigid Protestants were furthering the rationalist Enlightenment. Yet they did so. Persons who in other lands were being persecuted for their faith and their opinions, fled to the shadow of Calvinism in search of protection. Extremes meet. Within two centuries



from the deaths of Castellio and Calvin, the demands of the former and the demands of the latter, brotherly toleration, on the one hand, and religion, on the other, were to dwell peaceably side by side in Holland, in England, and in America.

For Castellio's ideals, like Calvin's, outlived their creator. When a man dies, it may seem for a brief space that his message has evaporated into the void; for a few decades silence may enfold it, as the earth his coffin. No one breathed the name of Castellio; his friends died or vanished; the few of his writings that had been published gradually became unobtainable, and no one ventured to print the others. It might have been supposed that his fight had been fought, his life lived, in vain. But history moves along strange routes. The apparently unqualified success of his opponent, promoted Castellio's resurrection. The victory of Calvinism in Holland was too complete. The preachers, annealed in the fanatical school of the Academy, thought it incumbent upon them to outdo Calvin's severities in the newly conquered land. Soon, however, among this stubborn people, who had successfully defended themselves against those who claimed empery over the Old World and the New, resistance raised its head. The Netherlands would not endure to have their newly acquired political liberties stifled by dogmatic coercion in the realm of conscience. Some of the clergy began to remonstrate—being later known as "remonstrants"—against the totalitarian claims of Calvinism; and, when they were in search of spiritual weapons against unsparing orthodoxy, they suddenly remembered a forerunner, who had become almost legendary. Coornhert and the other liberal Protestants disinterred his writings, and from 1603 onwards began to reprint them in the original and in Dutch translations. On all hands they secured attention and aroused increasing admiration.

It became apparent that Castellio's ideal of toleration had not perished in the tomb, but had outlived a severe winter. Now it was to blossom with renewed energy. The enthusiasts for toleration were not content with the already published writings of the Master, but sent emissaries to Basle to secure those which had been left behind in manuscript. Having been brought to Holland, these works were published in the original and in translations, so that half a century after Castellio's death a collected edition appeared at Gouda (1612). Thereupon, the resurrected Castellio became a centre of controversy, and had for the first time a large circle of disciples. His influence was widespread, though almost impersonal and anonymous. Castellio's thoughts lived again in others' works and others' struggles. The Arminians' famous advocacy of liberal reforms in Protestantism was mainly supported by arguments derived from his writings. When an Anabaptist was being tried for heresy at Chur, Gantner, a Grisonese preacher, took up the cudgels on behalf of the accused, and appeared in court with "Martinius Bellius's" book in his hand. It is probable, indeed, although documentary evidence of the hypothesis is lacking, that Descartes and Spinoza were directly influenced by Castellio's ideas, since Castellio's works were now so widely read in Holland. However this may be, the cause of toleration was not espoused by intellectuals and humanists alone. Gradually it became the cause of the whole population of the Low Countries, who were weary of theological disputations and fratricidal wars of religion. In the Peace of Utrecht, the idea of toleration became a weapon of statecraft, materializing vigorously out of the realm of abstraction to take up its abode on solid earth. The ardent appeal made by Castellio to the princes, demanding that they should show respect for one another's opinions, had now been heard by a free people and embodied in its laws. From this first province of

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what was to be a world dominion, the idea of toleration for every creed and every opinion started its conquest; and one country after another, accepting Castellio's message, condemned persecution of religious or philosophical opinions. In the French Revolution, the rights of the individual were at length guaranteed. It was declared that men had been born free and equal, that they were entitled to express their opinion and to proclaim their faith without restraint. By the time that the next century, the nineteenth, was well under way, the notion of liberty—the liberty of nations, of individuals, of thoughts—had been accepted as an inalienable maxim by the civilized world.



## Appendix A

### BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

No new editions of Sebastian Castellio's writings have recently been issued, except for a reprint of the French version of *Concerning Heretics* (Martinius Bellius, *De haereticis*, "Magdeburg," 1554). This French version was published at Rouen in the same year as the Latin original; and was reprinted at Geneva in 1913, edited by A. Olivet with a preface by Professor Choisy. See also *Concerning Heretics*, an English version, with excerpts from other works of Sebastian Castellio and David Joris on Religious Liberty, by Roland H. Bainton, 1935, being volume XXII of the *Records of Civilization*, published by the Columbia University Press. An edition of the hitherto unpublished *De arte dubitandi* (1562) is being prepared by Dr. Elisabeth Feist from the Rotterdam manuscript for the Academia di Roma. The quotations in the present work are partly taken from the original editions of Castellio's writings, and partly from the only two notable books hitherto devoted to Castellio: (1) *Sébastien Castellion, sa vie et son oeuvre* (1515-1563), by Ferdinand Buisson, 2 vols., Hachette, Paris, 1892 (this work contains a full bibliography to date of publication); (2) *Sébastien Castellion et la Réforme Calviniste*, by Etienne Giran, Paris, 1914. In view of the dispersal of the fragmentary material, I am greatly indebted to the assistance of Mademoiselle Liliane Rosset, of Vésenay, and Monsieur Jean Schorer, Pastor in Geneva. Special acknowledgments are also due to the Basle University Library

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(which generously allowed me access to the collection of Castellio's manuscripts), to the Zurich Central Library, and to the British Museum Reading Room in London.

## Appendix B

### SOME ITEMS OF SIXTEENTH CENTURY CHRONOLOGY

- 1503 John Frith born at Westerham, Kent.
- 1505 Birth of John Knox.
- 1509 Calvin born at Noyon in Picardy, July 10.
- 1509 Etienne Dolet born at Orleans, August 3.
- 1509 or 1511. Miguel Servetus born at Tudela (Navarre)  
or at Villanueva (Arragon)—exact place and date  
uncertain.
- 1515 Castellio born at Saint-Martin-du-Fresne,  
Dauphiné.
- 1517 Luther's ninety-five theses against indulgences pub-  
lished at Wittenberg.
- 1519 Bèze born at Vézelay, June 24.
- 1520 Excommunication of Luther.
- 1521 Diet of Worms.
- 1528 Capuchin order recognized by Pope.
- 1529 Louis de Berquin burned in Paris for heresy, April 22.
- 1531 Servetus's *De Trinitatis erroribus libri septem* pub-  
lished at Hagenau.
- 1531 Zwingli killed at the battle of Kappel, October 11.
- 1532 John Frith arrested for heresy by order of Sir  
Thomas More.
- 1533 John Frith burned at Smithfield for heresy, July 4.
- 1534 Act of Supremacy, whereby Henry VIII was  
acknowledged head of English Church.
- 1534 Bernardino Ochino becomes a Capuchin, when 47  
years old.
- 1535 Sir Thomas More executed on Tower Hill, July 6.



# ITEMS OF SIXTEENTH CENTURY CHRONOLOGY

- 1536 Calvin's *Institutio religionis Christianae*, published in Basle, March.
- 1536 Town's Meeting in Geneva avers determination to live thenceforward exclusively according to the gospels and God's word. May 31.
- 1536 Death of Erasmus, at Basle, July 12.
- 1536 Calvin comes to Geneva, July.
- 1536 Calvin appointed "Reader of Holy Writ" in Geneva. September 5.
- 1538 Calvin and Farel, after a referendum, ordered to quit Geneva within three days from April 23.—Calvin settles in Strasburg.
- 1539 General Edict against the Lutherans in France, June 24.
- 1540 Three Lutherans burned alive at Lyons, January.
- 1540 Castellio becomes overtly Protestant, and leaves Lyons for Strasburg. Springtime.
- 1540 French translation of Calvin's *Institutio* first published.
- 1540 Foundation of Society of Jesus approved by Pope, and Loyola becomes first general in 1541.
- 1541 Calvin re-enters Geneva by special invitation, amid popular rejoicings. September 13.
- 1542 Castellio appointed rector of College of Geneva, March 23. Also informally commissioned to preach in Vandoeuvres, a suburb of Geneva.
- 1542 Castellio's *Four Books of Sacred Dialogues* in Latin and French published at Geneva, end of year (antedated 1543).
- 1542 Bernardino Ochino, denounced to the Inquisition as a "Lutheran," flees from Italy.
- 1542-1547. Ochino in Basle and Augsburg.
- 1543 Plague in Geneva. Calvin and other preachers refuse to visit pest-hospital.
- 1543 Geneva Council recommends Castellio's appointment as preacher. December 15.

# ITEMS OF SIXTEENTH CENTURY CHRONOLOGY

- 1544 Six months' campaign of Calvin against Castellio, who thereupon wishes to resign.
- 1544 Castellio's informal position as preacher at Vandoeuvres quashed, and his appointment as rector of the college in Geneva cancelled. July.  
Castellio leaves Geneva for Berne, and thence removes to Basle. July and August.
- 1546 Death of Luther, February 18.
- 1546 Servetus opens a correspondence with Calvin. January or February.  
Calvin touched on the raw by Servetus's outspoken criticism of *Institutio*; and outraged by the tenor of a MS. copy of Servetus's still unpublished *Restitutio*, Calvin writes to Farel: "Did Servetus come to Geneva, I would never suffer him to go away alive." Ides of February.
- 1546 Etienne Dolet burned in Paris as relapsed atheist. August 3.
- 1547 Death of Henry VIII of England, accession of Edward VI, January 28.
- 1547-1553. Ochino in England.
- 1548 Giordano Bruno born at Nola.
- 1549 Bucer, at Cranmer's instigation, becomes professor of theology at Cambridge.
- 1551 Bucer dies at Cambridge, February 28.
- 1553 Death of Edward VI of England, accession of Mary, July 6.
- 1553 Clandestine publication of Servetus's *Christianismi restitutio*.
- 1553 Calvin prompts Guillaume Trie's letter denouncing Miguel Servetus to the ecclesiastical authorities at Lyons. February 26.
- 1553 Servetus escapes from episcopal prison at Lyons (probably with connivance of authorities), April 7.
- 1553 Servetus burned in effigy at Lyons, together with his books, *Christianismi restitutio*, etc. June 17.

# ITEMS OF SIXTEENTH CENTURY CHRONOLOGY

- 1553 Servetus arrested in Geneva. Sunday, August 13.
- 1553 Servetus burned alive at Champel, near Geneva, October 27.
- 1554 Knox visits Calvin at Geneva and Bullinger at Zurich.
- 1554-1563. Ochino in Basle and Zurich.
- 1554 Calvin publishes his first apologia for his conduct in the Servetus affair: *Defensio orthodoxae fidei de Sacra Trinitate, etc.*, and, in French, *Declaration, etc., contre les erreurs détestables de Michel Servetus*, both at end of February at Geneva.
- 1554 Castellio's *De haereticis* published in March.
- 1554 Calvin writes to Bullinger about *De haereticis*, March 28.
- 1554 Publication of de Bèze's *De haereticis a civili magistrata puniendis libellus, adversus Martini Belli farra-ginem, etc.*, September.
- 1554 Castellio's *Contra libellum Calvini*, written for publication this year, but first published at Amsterdam in 1612.
- 1556 Cranmer burned at Oxford, March 21.
- 1556 Knox again in Geneva.
- 1556 Death of Loyola at Rome, July 31.
- 1558 Death of Mary Tudor, November 17, accession of Elizabeth Tudor.
- 1560 Melanchthon died, April 19.
- 1560 Knox's Confession of Faith adopted, and Roman Catholicism formally abolished by Scottish Parliament.
- 1562 Castellio's *De arte dubitandi* written, but not published.
- 1562 Castellio's *Conseil à la France désolée*. October.
- 1563 de Bèze's *Responsio ad defensiones et reprehensiones Sebastiani Castellionis* published in Geneva.
- 1563 Publication of Ochino's *Thirty Dialogues*.



# ITEMS OF SIXTEENTH CENTURY CHRONOLOGY

- 1563 Formal complaint against Castellio, as blasphemer, etc., lodged with Basle authorities, November.
- 1563 Castellio died at Basle, December 29.
- 1564 Calvin died in Geneva, May 27.
- 1564 or 1655. Bernardino Ochino died in Moravia.
- 1564 Bèze succeeded Calvin as pastor at Geneva.
- 1572 Massacre of St. Bartholomew, August 24.
- 1572 Death of John Knox, November 24.
- 1592 Giordano Bruno arrested at Naples by order of the Inquisition. May 22.
- 1600 Bruno burned in the Campo dei Fiori, Rome. February 17.

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## ERASMUS and THE RIGHT TO HERESY

by Stefan Zweig

Translated by Eden and Cedar Paul

In *Erasmus and The Right to Heresy*, one of the great European writers of the twentieth century tackles the issues of tolerance and power, peace and violence, understanding and prejudice that lie at the roots of modern Europe's dilemmas.

This volume brings together two of Stefan Zweig's most compelling studies of the historic moments that have helped to create our world: the confrontation between the great humanist scholar Erasmus and the angry reformer Martin Luther; and that between the gentle theologian Sebastian Castellio and the fanatical moralist Calvin.

First published in Austria in the 1930s, when those traditions of reason and tolerance which Zweig saw as essential to the Europe he knew faced extinction, *Erasmus and The Right to Heresy* are at once his protest against dictatorship and his celebration of the continuing conflict between enlightenment and tyranny. They became indeed a 'bible' for the German emigration.

No less now than when they were written, the intensity of their writing draws the reader magnetically into a recreated world, and convinces us not only, as Zweig remarks, that 'history moves along strange routes', but also that these routes lead inexorably to our own present.

STEFAN ZWEIG was born in Vienna in 1881. Educated at the Vienna Gymnasium and the University of Vienna, he obtained a Ph.D. in 1904. An immensely prolific writer, in his prime he was probably the most widely read German author since Goethe. His output included novels, plays, essays, poems, historical works and critical studies, all with an almost universal appeal, for he set himself to be a true European, recognising no frontiers but those of spirit and intellect. The two world wars of this century caused a shattering of his ideals: during the 1914-18 struggle, unable to take sides himself, he sought refuge in Switzerland; in 1939 there was no such escape from reality. Broken-hearted, he fled to Brazil and there committed suicide, unable to hope that the Europe he had believed in would ever exist again.

*Erasmus and The Right to Heresy* were both first published in Austria in 1938. The English translation reissued here was previously published in 1951 and has been out of print for many years.

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